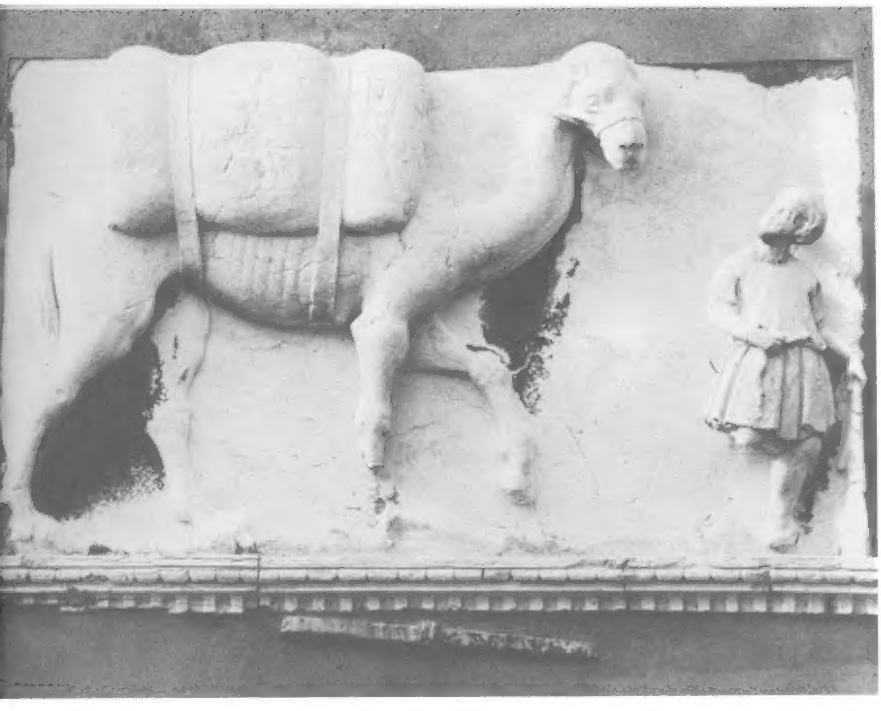
FABLE of VENICE

CORTO MALTESE

(SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH)
A.:.L.:.G.:.D.:.G.:.A.:.D.:.L.:.U.:.

HUGO PRATT

F
PRATT,
H.



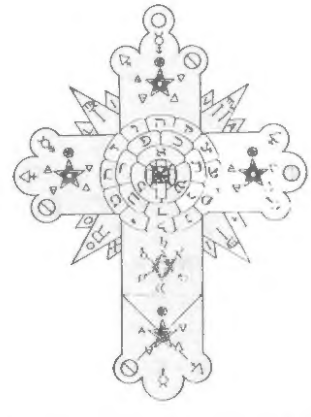
Bas-relief from the palace of the three Rioba brothers, Arab merchants of Venice.

yos and the Azims; the latter were Byzantine glassblowers in Murano.

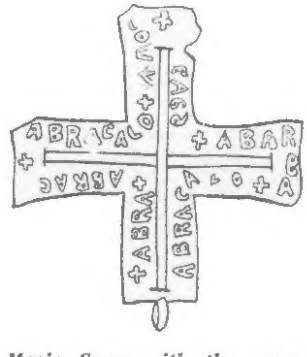
Among the family, one often spoke about Arab merchants or spies, ome to Venice to seek what Venetian pirates had stolen from them. It was ven a subject of daily conversation at our house. I remember one day one f my uncles accompanied me to a little tucked-away square close to San arsial and showed me a marble bat in an alabaster alcove. He explained at it was the symbol of a sect of Saracen adventurers allied with the Tem-lars and the Teutonic Knights. Time passed. I began to go to the ghetto by yself and spend more and more time with my friends from the two little quares and stayed in their houses.

Then events took me to Africa. In Ethiopia in Addis Ababa, I rediscovered the Venetian ambience in the Greco-Armenian-Jewish-Egyptian community. I discovered in the libraries of Dabra Markos, Dabra Ghiorghis, Dabra ariam, and in books and Coptic images of the Queen of Sheba and King olomon, that in the life of true seekers of knowledge there are always seven ecret gates. I noticed that there were always seven magic formulae, that the evils are the same and the esoteric books closely similar (although the Copts ave a few extra fallen angels). The Coptic literature contained ancient tales ith some apocryphal additions. My new East African friends, a little older, counted marvelous stories about the voyages of Enoch and the Gardens f Eden. The young girls had the same disconcerting smiles as the young rls of the ghetto, but the earthenware eyes of the former were quite differ-nt from the Venetian eyes of the latter.

Then came the war, and I spent some time in Danakil and Ogaden, mong camels and smugglers. A Danakil camel-driver taught me that to enter to Al-Jannah al-Adn, the Garden of Eden, you must open seven gates in e desert; to do so, you must know the names of the seven terrible angels f the Shaitan tribe or be accompanied by a poet with a gold key under his ngue. Then an Eritrean Arab taught me that the Adriatic was called Giun -Banadiqin, the "Venetian Gulf," and that the Egyptians called Venice Al-nduqiyyah.



Rosy-Cross. *Symbol of the esoteric Society of the Golden Dawn, to which Joyce, Baron Corvo and Yeats belonged.*



Magic Cross with the name of Abraxas.

Christian-Jewish cross of the Valentinians.

FABLE OF VENICE

(SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH)

A.·.L.·.G.·.D.·.G.·.A.·.D.·.L.·.U.·.

Also Available
in the Corto Maltese series:
The Brazilian Eagle, $8.95
Banana Conga, $8.95
Voodoo for the President, $8.95
A Midwinter Morning's Dream, $8.95
In Africa, $8.95
The Early Years (in color), $8.95
In Siberia, $10.95

Please add $2 P&H on 1st book,
$1 for each additional.
Write for our complete
catalog of graphic novels:
NBM
35-53 70th St.
Jackson Heights, NY 11372

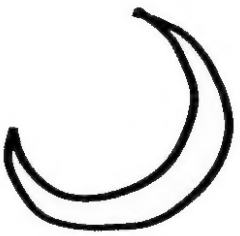
© Casterman 1981
© NBM for the English translation 1990
Translation by Elizabeth Bell
Lettering by Rachael Rodrigo

ISBN 0-918348-96-X

FABLE OF VENICE

(SIRAT aL BUNDUQIYYAH)

A.·.L.·.G.·.D.·.G.·.A.·.D.·.L.·.U.·.

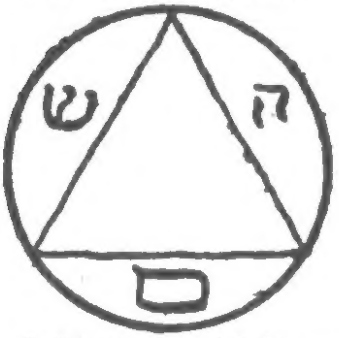


HUGO PRATT

NANTIER · BEALL · MINOUSTCHINE
Publishing co.
new york

Solomon's seal.

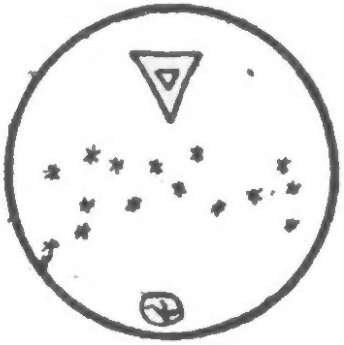
Amulets, talismans and pentacles from the Judeo-Greco-Venetian tradition.



Ha-Sche-m. *Divine triad whose name is known only to the initiates of the Cabal.*

Merashim. *A charm against devils. The falling star depicts the descent of a rebellious angel.*

Elohim Schamaym Arets. *God, Heaven and Earth.*



Symbols for the inscription above.
God = triangle.
Heaven = stars.
Earth = ball of lead.

A Venetian Grandmother

I was four or five, perhaps six, the first time my grandmother asked me to accompany her to the Old Ghetto of Venice. We went to visit one of her old friends, Signora Bora Levi, in her old house. To get there we climbed an outdoor wood staircase named variously the "Crazy Stairs," the "Sewer Rat Stairs" or the "Turkish Stairs." Signora Bora Levi gave me an almond candy, a thick, steaming cup of chocolate and two saltless crackers that I didn't like at all. Then she and Grandmother sat down to play cards, smiling and murmuring things to each other I couldn't understand.

I had nothing to do, so I meticulously scrutinized each of the hundred medallions hanging on the dark red velour walls, which seemed to observe me from behind their glass ovals. I say they observed me because the medallions were portraits of severe-looking gentlemen in Hapsburg uniforms or rabbis with delicate black braids and broad-brimmed felt hats. Their gazes held mine with an insistence bordering on the indiscreet.

A bit disconcerted, I went to the kitchen window and looked down at the weed-choked courtyard and its well ringed with ivy. It was called the Secret Courtyard, or Courtyard of the Arcane. To get into it, you had to open seven gates, each engraved with the name of a "shed," demons of the caste of the Shedim, fathered by Adam when he was separated from Eve after their act of disobedience.Each gate opened to a magic word, the names of the demons. I still recall the terrible names: Sam Ha, Mawet, Ashmodai, Shibbetta, Ruah, Kardeyakos, Na'Amah.

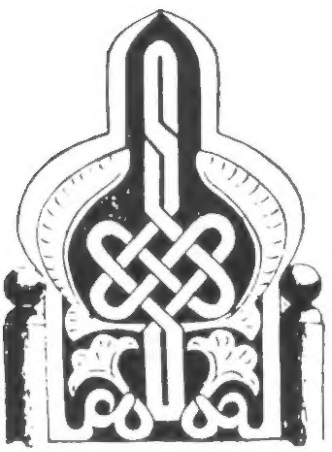
One day Signora Bora Levi took me by the hand and led me to the Secret Courtyard, lighting our way with a menorah, or seven- branched candelabrum. Each time she opened a gate, she blew out a candle. The courtyard was full of sculptures and wall drawings: a king with bow and arrows wrestling with a god; a newborn baby; a huntress, also armed with her bow; a one-eyed cow; a six-pointed star; a naked young girl dancing inside a circle drawn on the ground; the names of the fallen angels, outcasts of God: Samaël, Sataël, Amabiel. The Jewess spoke of all these things and answered my questions. Then she opened a gate at the rear of the courtyard and led me through a passageway with tall weeds to another marvelous little square. I saw it again much later, full of flowers, in a house in Cordoba's Juderia.

I remember that there was a very beautiful woman in the Secret Courtyard, always surrounded by children and teenaged girls playing around an enormous butterfly made of bits of colored glass.It was Aurelia, the gnostic butterfly. A gnosis representing itself as an inexhaustible font of wisdom and offering, in its thousand colored reflections, what any person may desire.

These two diminutive squares, connected by this hidden alleyway called "The Narrow Passageway of Nostalgia," were the legendary nexus where two secret worlds converged: one issuing from Talmudic disciplines, the other from philosophical, esoteric, Judeo-Greek-Oriental disciplines. This entire maze of stairways, alleys, courtyards and little squares was called the "Seraglio

Secret courtyard of the Arcana.

Bridge of Nostalgia.



Saracen Black Guard.

of Beautiful Ideas'' or ''Seraglio of the Hebrews.'' In this wonderful pla
played with Jewish children who told me tales of ancient times and hel
ne scale the walls of the forbidden enclosure. The girls had impishly disc
erting smiles which I captured in their eyes bathed in the golden shad
of attics. They introduced me to the Abraxas of Basilides and the Pythagor
symbols, the crescent-moon serpents and the designs of Menander and Sa
inus. There I first heard the names of Simon the Magician, Manes, Orig
Arius, Valentinus, Justin, Carpocrates, Epiphanius, Tertullian, Augustine, Hy

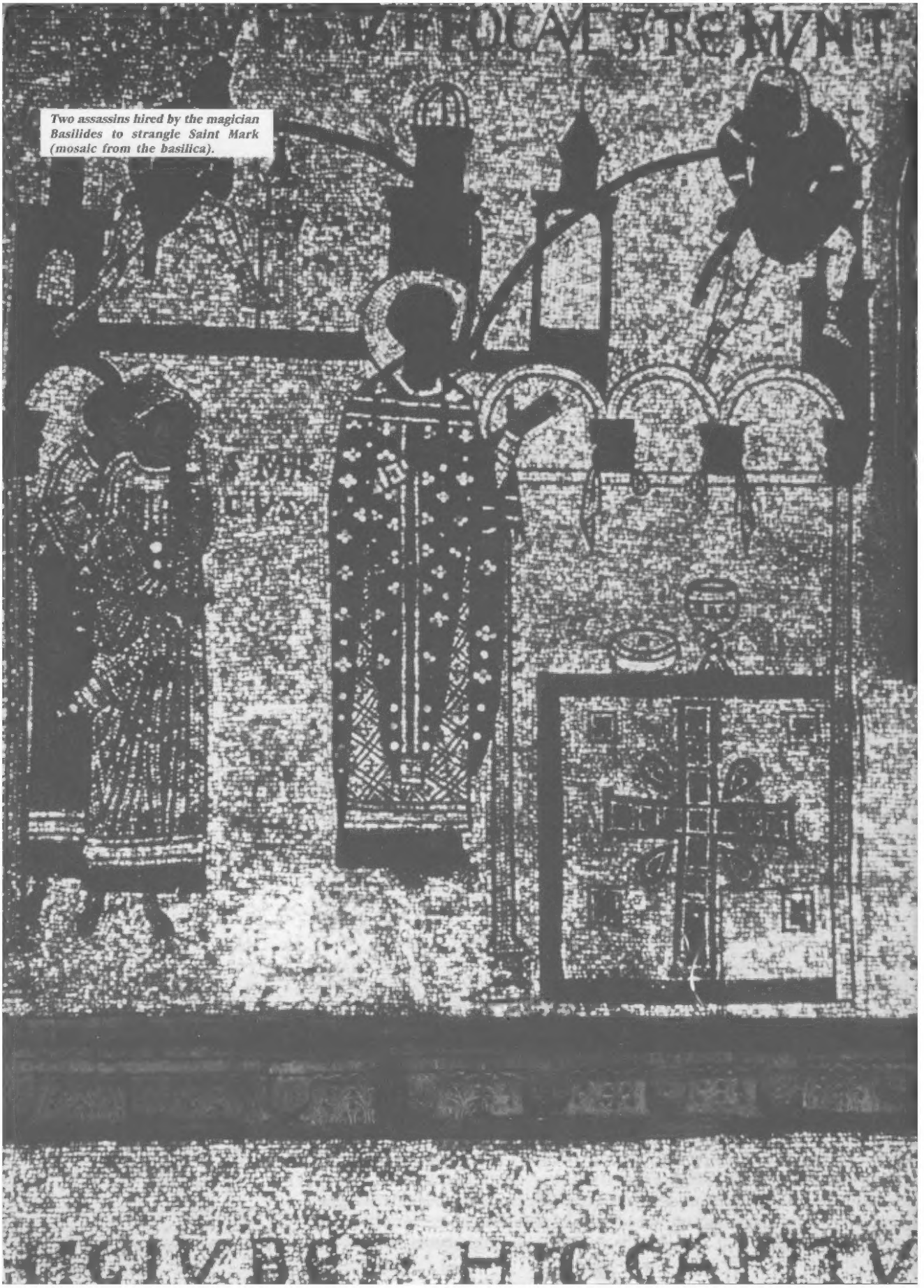
The Courtyard of the Maltese or Gold Mouth's Courtyard.

tia and so many others. It was in this enchanted world that I also heard of Solomon's Clavicle and Satan's emerald, which, according to hermetic tradition, was separated from the angel of evil's forehead to become the symbol of the "Accursed Science" among men.

After a time, my grandmother decided it was time to return home (we lived on the other side of the city, in Bragora), and it was with actual physical pain that I took leave of these mysterious friends. I was still too young for my parents to let me roam by myself, and had to wait a whole week, sometimes more, to return to the ghetto. On the way home, we passed through Rio della Sensa to the Madonna dell'Orto, where statues of three Arab brothers (El Rioba, Sandi and Afani) were set into the walls of the ancient "Fontego of the Moors, or Saracens." When I asked who these people dressed like Greeks were, my grandmother responded that they were Moors, Turkish Mamelukes. She made it quite clear that this was not an appropriate question to ask. Then grandmother went to play a number in the lotto according to the Venetian cabala of lotteries.

These unanswered questions about the Turks, Saracens and Arabs stimulated my curiosity to such a point that I began to demand explanations from many members of my family. Thus I learned that the Generos, on my mother's side, came from Spanish Toledo and were of Sephardic-Marrano origin, converted to Christianity as a result of the bloody persecutions of 1390 in Spain. The Generos had family ties with the Toledanos, the Greg-

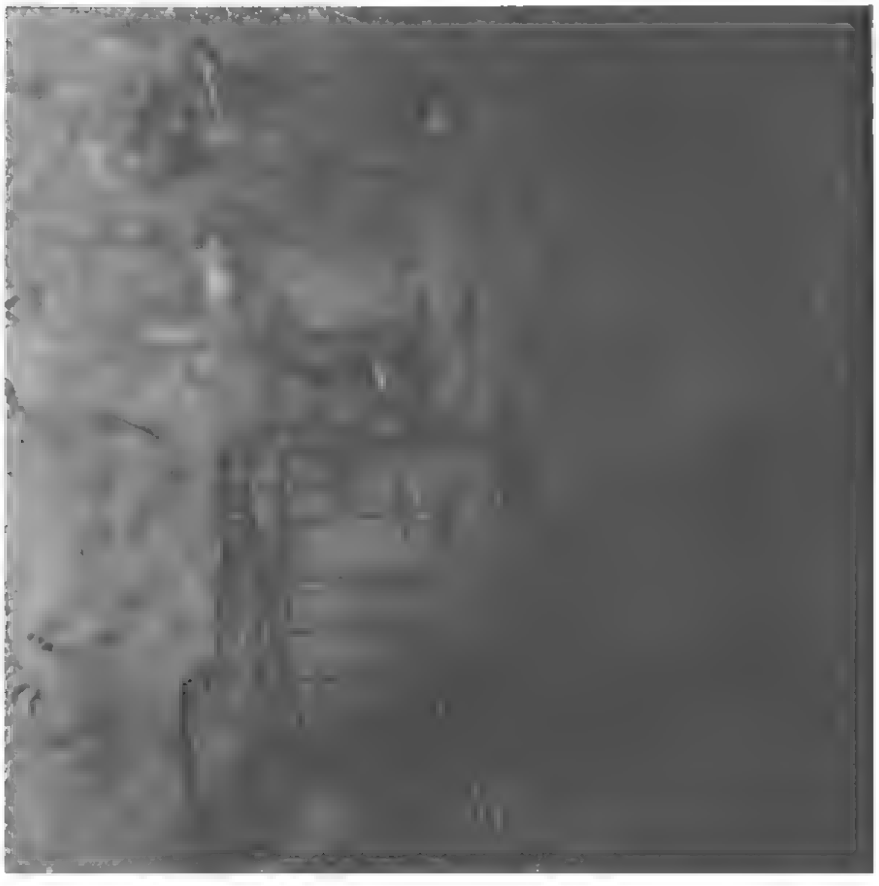
Good luck Amulet of the Cainites, *one of the numerous heretical sects of the 2nd century A.D. in Eqypt.*

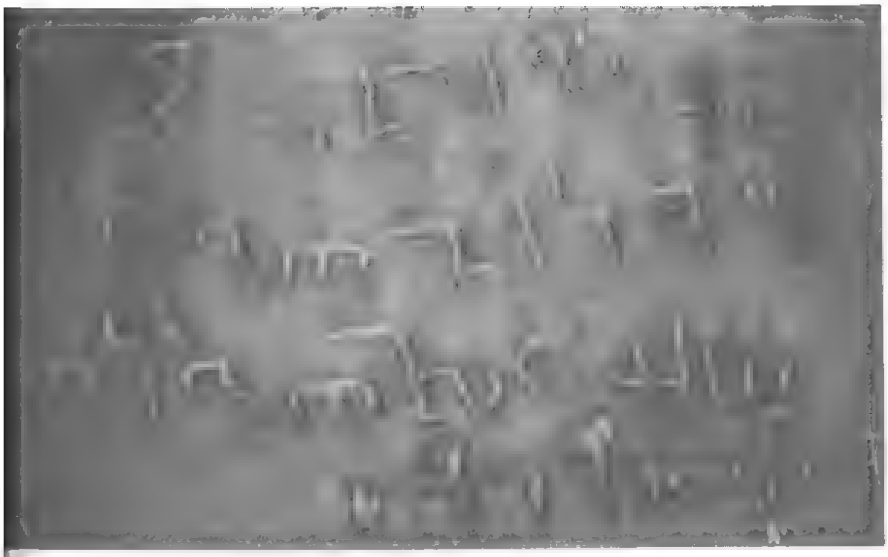


Two assassins hired by the magician Basilides to strangle Saint Mark (mosaic from the basilica).

Square of the Golden Arab.

Sketched on a column of St. Mark's Basilica, this graffito represents a ship of the Venetian Navy around 1200.





Inscriptions in Aramaic Greek.

Shebriri. *Counters the evil eye*

Abreq Ad Habra. *Calls down the thunder that kills A 3X3 formula with aleph*

A B R A C A D A B R A
A B R A C A D A B R
A B R A C A D A B
A B R A C A D A
A B R A C A D
A B R A C A
A B R A C
A B R A
A B R
A B
A

Cabalistic Pythagorean formula. *From abracadabra to gnostic Abraxas gems.*

A B Λ A N A Θ A N A Λ B A
A B Λ A N A Θ A N A Λ B
A B Λ A N A Θ A N A Λ
A B Λ A N A Θ A N A
A B Λ A N A Θ A N
A B Λ A N A Θ A
A B Λ A N A Θ
A B Λ A N A
A B Λ A N
A B Λ A
A B A
A B
A

Ablanathanalba. *Magical medicinal amulet.*

When I returned to Italy, the war still wasn't over: the houses of he Venetian ghetto were boarded up, and the Jews who had fled them were iding among the Venetians. At night, in low voices, people again told one nother the ancient Arab-Spanish tales; they spoke about the cabalistic city f Safed in Palestine, where the tomb of Simon Ben Yohai, the presumed uthor of the Zohar, the "Book of Splendors," was located. Once again, on oly days, I ate crackers without salt and didn't like it.

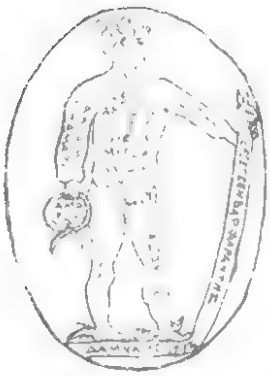
The war came to an end. Since then I come and go throughout the orld, almost aimlessly. But I always return eventually to Venice. I stroll its lleyways, cross the canals, pause on its bridges and note that the shore no nger teems with crabs lazing in the afternoon sun. They disappeared a long me ago. I search for places I knew as a child, but often I don't recognize hem. The "Crazy Staircase" is gone, and Signora Bora Levi is gone, too. he windows of her house are walled over; the neighborhood has changed. o one wants to answer my questions. The young don't know and the old on't want to remember.

One day, I found the name of the old Jewish woman who used to ive me sugar-plums and piping-hot chocolate, engraved on a marble plaque ear the front gate of the old Schola Espanola, along with the names of several ther deported Jews who never returned. There weren't too many names ecause Venice hid her Jews. She hid them in her "Secret Courtyards," her Arcana," courtyards still hidden today behind jealous walls, whose street umbers change under the too insistent gaze of the uninitiated. The decay-ng names remain, wearing away, traced like funeral announcements on huge hite rectangles bordered in black, and the striped cats remain, seemingly eady with a riddle, suggesting that everything is there as before: you just ave to want to find it. Surely it can still be found on the other side of the breo Bridge, in the bistros where card players still use the old Arabdecks o play Saracen, Mohammedan or Beautiful Jewess, games from the Orient nd Spain. The Marrano Jews have preserved their cards and keep the old eys to Spanish houses above the frames of their Venetian doors like a promis-ory note to the diaspora from the Spanish Inquisition. In my house, too, here was a Spanish key from Toledo. I inherited it from my grandmother, long with her ironic fatalism and an Arab deck of cards that is surely magic.

On the Fondamenta leading to Madonna dell' Orto and San Marsiliano, here's a palace with a Teutonic cross, a rose, and a stone camel. Perhaps . means nothing to most people, but if one is a Venetian at heart, one un-

This lion, which dates from around 1000 A.D., is the oldest representation of St. Mark.

Photos Antonio Martinelli © Pratt



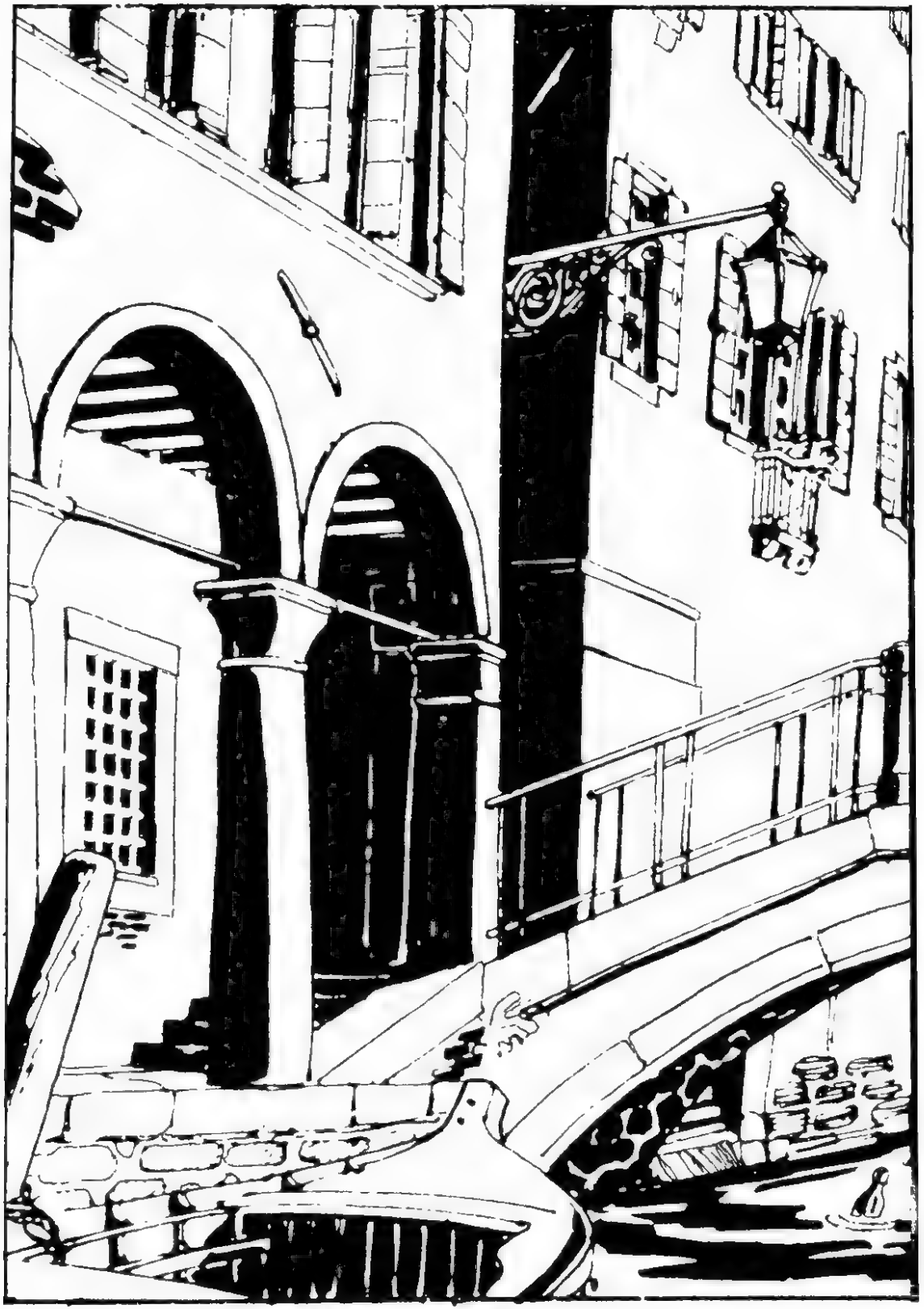
Gnostic amethyst. *St. Michael metamorphosed into Mercury Syncretism of Christian, Jewish and Egyptian schools of Venice*

Gnostic amulet. *Represents Abraxas, the most important spirit of the entire gnostic system. Its cabalistic numeral is 365, the number of days in the year. His disciples strangled the Evangelist St. Mark at Alexandria in Egypt.*

derstands immediately that a Teutonic symbol surely hides an enigma; a r entwined around a cross only adds to the mystery. The presence of the ca ends up completely captivating this Venetian's soul, infinitely drawn tow intrigue.

HUGO PRA

Editor's note: The character "The Poet" that you will meet is an allus to Gabriele d'Annunzio, a national hero who helped lead Italy down the p to fascism. He is also responsible for getting Mussolini to revive the Rom salute, arm outstretched...

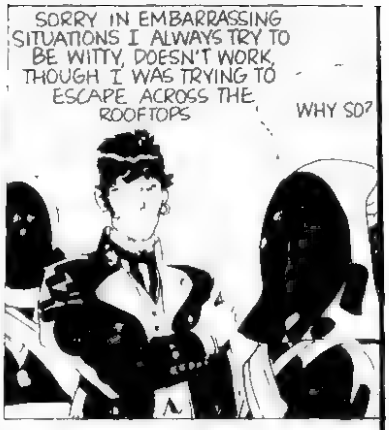


Chapter I

GOD'S WHEELS
SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH
OR RATHER ABRA CADABRA WITH EIA EIA AND ALALA. THE LAST TITLES MORE UNDERSTANDABLE BUT LESS POETIC THAN THE FIRST. MORE ARAB AND ARISTOCRATIC ONE SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH MEANS MORE OR LESS FABLE OF VENICE. BOTH TITLES ARE FINE WITH ME, YOU CAN TAKE YOUR PICK. OUR STORY BEGINS WITH THE BLOW OF THE MALLET, FOLLOWED BY OTHERS IN THE PATTERN R∴L∴HERMES OF THE A∴L∴A∴M∴ OF G∴L∴D∴I∴ IN VENICE.
BROTHERS OF THE NORTHERN COLONY, WE WILL NOW OPEN OUR SESSION ON ARCHITECTONICS
TOCK! TOCK!
TO THE GLORY OF THE GREAT ARCHITECT OF THE UNIVERSE, IN THE NAME OF UNIVERSAL MASONRY, UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE GRAND LODGE OF ITALY OF THE ANCIENT FREE AND RECOGNIZED MASONS, I DECLARE THIS SESSION OF OUR VENERABLE LODGE NOW OPEN
TOCK! TOCK! TOCK!
BE SEATED, BROTHERS!
TOK! TOCK! TOK!
WORSHIPFUL MASTER, WE HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THE NEW APPRENTICES.

NOW HOLD ON, BROTHER DOROME WE CAN'T
BANG! BANG!
..SPEND EVERY SESSION TALKING ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS WITH APPRENTICES ASKING QUESTIONS. WE'VE GOT MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO RIGHT NOW
SOME APPRENTICES ARE SUFFICIENTLY TRAINED ALREADY TO HELP US. IT'S NOT WISE TO INSIST ON THEIR KEEPING QUIET
BANG!
WHAT IS ALL THIS?
YOU ALL RIGHT?
I'M NOT SURE YET. YOU MIGHT BELONG TO THE PYTHAGORAS

ARE YOU HURT? HOW COME YOU FELL THROUGH THE ROOF?
I OFTEN FALL FROM HIGH


SORRY IN EMBARRASSING SITUATIONS I ALWAYS TRY TO BE WITTY, DOESN'T WORK, THOUGH I WAS TRYING TO ESCAPE ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS
WHY SO?

I DIDN'T YELL "VIVA SOMEBODY" AND SOMEBODY ELSE GOT MAD SO I HAD TO FIGHT THEM OFF AND RUN TIMES ARE ROUGH.

YOU'RE RIGHT TIMES ARE ROUGH AND YOU MEET ROUGH SORTS AT NIGHT
DAYTIME TOO FOR THAT MATTER! SORRY TO HAVE BARGED IN ON YOUR MEETING

ARE YOU STILL ERECTING TEMPLES TO VIRTUE AND DARK DUNGEONS FOR VICE?

WE WORK FOR THE BENEFIT AND PROGRESS OF THE FATHERLAND AND HUMANITY BUT YOU SPEAK LIKE A BROTHER ARE YOU A FREEMASON?

NO, NO!..I'M JUST A FREE SAILOR, AT LEAST I HOPE I AM!
IF YOU'RE AN OUTSIDER, YOU UNDERSTAND OF COURSE, THAT YOU CAN'T STAY HERE

BUT BEFORE YO LEAVE THE TEMP LET THE BROTHE INNER GUARD MA SURE IT'S SAFE LEAVE THE LODGE.

WELL EVERYTHING SEEMS QUIET ENOUGH

CONDUCT THE LAYMAN TO THE HALL OF LOST STEPS.

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT? YOU'RE NOT WOUNDED?
I'M SURE!
THEN GO AND FORGET WHAT YOU'VE SEEN THAT'S ALL WE ASK OF YOU
OH, I'LL FORGET ABOUT YOU, NO PROBLEM BUT THE GUYS WHO WERE AFTER ME ARE AFTER YOU TOO
I HEARD THEM SAYING THAT AMONG "YOU" THERE'S ONE OF "THEM" THE ONES AFTER ME MENTIONED THE NAME PYTHAGORAS
WE TOLD YOU 'LAYMAN, TIMES ARE ROUGH BUT THANKS FOR WARNING US ANYWAY, WE'RE NOT WITH "PYTHAGORAS"
THEN YOU'RE WITH THE R L HERMES. HMMM. I HEARD THEM MENTION THAT NAME TOO
GOOD EVENING. YOU TOOK YOUR TIME I SEE.
OH, SO YOU'RE HERE TOO NICE TEMPLE YOU'VE GOT
COULD BE BETTER. WE'RE SHORT OF FUNDS
DON'T LOOK AT ME, I'M A "LAYMAN"
MASONS AREN'T BIG ON WITTY REPARTEE
THAT'S YOUR BUSINESS
YOU'RE IN VENICE FOR A DIFFERENT "BUSINESS," I SUPPOSE

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
BEPI FALIERO
BUT NO RELATION TO THE FALIERO FAMILY THAT GAVE THE SERENISSIMA A CERTAIN ILL-REPUTED DOGE. AND YOU? WHY ARE YOU IN VENICE?
IT'S NOT MY FIRST TIME TIME IN VENICE IT'S MY TH.RD I'M HERE BECAUSE OF A BET
A BET? INTERESTING!
YES, A BET BETWEEN TWO SIMONS, THE APOSTLE SIMON PETER AND SIMON THE MAG.CIAN PETER WON A BAREKET AT ANTIOCH
A BAREKET? WHAT'S THAT?
A CLAVICLE OF SOLOMON!
A CLAVICLE OF SOLOMON? I DON'T GET IT
AN EMERALD!
AN EMERALD?
YES, A VERY PURE, EXTREMELY BEAUTIFUL EMERALD. THAT'S WHY I CAME TO VENICE!
I'VE NEVER HEARD OF IT. TELL ME, DOES THIS EMERALD REALLY EXIST OR IS IT A FABLE?
AH, THAT I DON'T KNOW BUT I BELIEVE IN FABLES ANYWAY. WHO'S THAT OVER THERE?
IT'S THEM!

DON'T TRY TO PICK A FIGHT WITH ME, STEVANI.
SO, FALIERO YOU'VE HAD ANOTHER MEETING TONIGHT TO ARRANGE THE FUTURE OF OUR TIMES
"DON'T TRY TO PICK A FIGHT"-- IS THAT SUPPOSED TO SCARE ME?
LEAVE US ALONE
"LEAVE US ALONE!" LISTEN TO THAT! THIS IDIOT THINKS I'LL TROT OFF WITHOUT SHOWING HIM A THING OR TWO!
WHY THIS CHIP ON YOUR SHOULDER? I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING TO YOU WE WENT TO SCHOOL TOGETHER HAVE A CIGARETTE
WHAT IS THIS? SCHOOL DAYS, CIGARETTES YOU SAP!
AND YOU WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY?
NOTHING! AS A RULE
I DON'T OFFER CIGARETTES TO PEOPLE I DON'T KNOW
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? TRYING TO GET SMART WITH US?
THINK WHAT YOU LIKE, STEVANI, BUT I'M NOT FALIERO AND YOU CAN'T INTIMIDATE ME
I'VE GOT NOTHING AGAINST YOU BUT YOU'RE IN BAD COMPANY
SHALL I TEACH HIM A LESSON, STEVANI?
SHUTUP BOSELLI NOT NOW.
I WOULDN'T NORMALLY BE SO STUPID AS TO WARN YOU THAT "IF YOU'RE NOT WITH US YOU'RE AGAINST US," BUT I ADVISE YOU TO LEAVE
I'LL THINK ABOUT IT
STOP EVERYONE, THE POET IS HERE

ONE MOMENT, MY DEAR FRIENDS I, THE POET, BEG YOU. PLEASE CALM DOWN
STEVANI, BOSELLI, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE AT SANTA AGNESE? I LEFT YOU AT THE PIAZZETTA DEI LEONCINI...
LISTEN, POET
YOU CAN'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT HERE, GO BACK TO THE ABRUZZI!
WHAT'S THE MATTER STEVANI, ARE YOU MAD AT ME?
DAMN RIGHT I'M MAD YOU NEVER KNOW FOR SURE WHAT THE BIGSHOTS WANT, BUT THAT'LL ALL CHANGE SOMEDAY AS FOR YOU, REMEMBER WHAT I TOLD YOU
WHAT'D YOU TELL ME?
YOU REALLY DON'T GET IT DO YOU? I REPEAT, YOU'D BE BETTER OFF TO AVOID CERTAIN COMPANY IT'S DANGEROUS
STEVANI, THIS IS NO TIME TO BE MAKING THREATS
DID ANYONE EVER TELL YOU YOU'RE A BORE, POET?
FALIERO, SAY HELLO TO HIPA FOR ME. SHE'S ONLY ONE OF Y THAT'S WORT ANYTH NG LET'S GO, MB
THEY'RE GONE AT LAST YOU'RE CRAZY TO NEEDLE STEVANI, YOU KNOW
HE STARTED IT
WELL, GENTLEMEN, I MUST LEAVE YOU NOW TOO BAD IT'S BEEN FUN
NONO DON'T LEAVE US NOW THE NIGHT IS YOUNG!

STEVAN! TOLD YOU TO SAY HELLO TO HIPAZIA- WHO'S THAT?
AH! WELL MAY YOU ASK! HIPAZIA THE SUBLIME, THE SUPERB
VENICE'S SPLENDID POET, MATHEMATICIAN, AND NEO-PLATONIST PHILOSOPHER. A STUNNING WOMAN
WE ALL TREMBLED WHEN THE SPANIARD TRIED TO OVERCOME HER BUT THANK HEAVENS, HIPAZIA WON OUT. IN THE END I'M GOING TO DEDICATE ONE OF MY POEMS TO HER
HIPAZIA I CAN'T EXACTLY RECALL BUT I'VE HEARD THAT NAME BEFORE
I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO HER THIS EVENING THERE'S A MEETING AT HER HOUSE
I'M SURE SHE'LL BE VERY HAPPY TO GET TO KNOW YOU
YES, YES! YOU MUST GO MY FRIEND
ALL THE CULTIVATED PEOPLE FROM ALL POLITICAL TENDENCIES GATHER IN HER SALON TO HEAR HER TALKS, OR SIMPLY ADMIRE HER
I MUST SAY YOU'VE PIQUED MY CURIOSITY. I ACCEPT YOUR INVITATION, FALIERO
VERY WELL, LET'S HURRY! BEFORE HER FATHER, DR THEON, DRIFTS OFF INTO THE STARS. HE'S AN ASTROLOGER, ASTRONOMER AND MATHEMATICIAN.
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
I THOUGHT I SAW SOMEONE

YOU ALWAYS SEE FLEETING SHADOWS IN VENICE BY NIGHT
I THOUGHT I SAW
.SOMEBODY I KNEW A LONG TIME AGO AN ENGLISH WR.TER BUT THAT'S IMPOSS.BLE SINCE HE DIED IN 19.3 HIS NAME WAS FREDRICK ROLFE,BETTER KNOWN AS BARON CORVO
OH BARON CORVO.
YES, AN ECCENTRIC- THE ENGLISH OFTEN ARE
HE WAS MORE THAN ECCENTRIC HE WANTED TO DESTROY HIMSELF EITHER TO SET AN EXAMPLE OR TO MAKE SOMEONE SORRY
I CAN STILL SEE HIM HE WAS A FRIEND OF STEVANI'S THEY WERE ALWAYS TOGETHER AT GRASPO DE UA...
OF STEVANI'S?
YES STEVANI'S FATHER. NOT THE ONE YOU MET TONIGHT BUT DID YOU KNOW BARON CORVO?
I MET HIM AT THE HOME OF LADY LAYARD, AN ELDERLY WOMAN WHO USED TO BEHAVE QUITE VULGARLY WITH HIM HOW ABOUT YOU?
ME? I WAS NEVER HIS FRIEND, BUT I LIKED HIS STYLE IN THE LATTER PART OF HIS LIFE STEVANI WAS REA..LY CLOSE TO H.M
I'D LIKE TO SPEAK TO STEVANI
TOWARD THE END OF HIS LIFE, I REMEMBER, HE WAS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING FRANTICALLY HE HUNG AROUND SAN PIETRO DI CASTE..LO AND THE ARSENAL A LOT WHO KNOWS WHAT HE WAS UP TO? WELL, MY FRIENDS, I MUST GO MY REGARDS TO "HIPAZIA THE DIVINE"
I'LL TRY TO GET YOU TOGETHER WITH STEVANI.
SO LONG, POET!
THAT'S ODD HOW DID HE COME TO BE STEVANI'S FRIEND?
THEY'RE NOT EXACTLY FR.ENDS!

HIPAZIA. HIPAZIA. WHERE'VE I HEARD THAT NAME BEFORE? I CAN'T SEEM TO RECALL.
YOU'LL HAVE TO ENTER ALONE THAT'S THE RULE BUT I'LL JOIN YOU SOON AFTER
I'LL LET OUR FRIENDS KNOW WHO YOU ARE..
THAT'S STRANGE AN ABRAXAS IN VENICE?
COME IN!
THATS THE SECOND TIME I'VE RUN ACROSS AN ABRAXAS IN VENICE IT'S THE SIGN OF THE DISCIPLES OF BASILIDES.
AURELIA

GOOD EVENING. I'M CORTO MALTESE, I WAS INVITED BY YOUR FRIEND BEPI FALIERO
YES
FALIERO JUST TOLD ME. WELCOME TO THIS HOUSE. I AM HIPAZIA, DAUGHTER OF THEON.
PLEASED TO MEET YOU.
YOU MAY FIND ALL THIS RATHER STRANGE BUT YOUR ARRIVAL IS SO SUDDEN. IF ONLY FALIERO HAD TOLD ME SOONER
HE DIDN'T HAVE TIME
AFTER YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH STEVANI LAST NIGHT, YOU COULD HAVE PHONED ME WE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED YOU FOR THE ENTHYMESIS
OH!
THE AGAPE IS OVER NOW TOO. BUT COME IN, I'LL INTRODUCE YOU
BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET CORTO MALTESE
GOOD EVENING!
DEAR ONES, PLEASE EXCUSE ME FOR THIS EVENING. WE'LL MEET AGAIN NEXT THURSDAY TO DISCUSS THE IMPORT OF ORIENTAL THEOSOPHY IN ALEXANDRIAN PHILOSOPHY
BEPI, STAY FOR AWHILE WITH YOUR FRIEND EXPLAIN TO ME WHAT HAPPENED WITH STEVANI.
WITH PLEASURE HIPAZIA BUT
THERE'S NOT MUCH TO TELL. STEVANI'S A TROUBLE-MAKER
YOU'RE SO LUCKY! YOU'RE STANDING NEXT TO HER NOW, LISTENING TO HER WORDS, BUT POOR BOEKE, HE'S OUT IN THE COLD

YEAH YOU'RE A LUCKY GUY!

BUT I'VE GOTTA GET BACK TO LITTLE SILVER FOOT SHE'LL BE FURIOUS

GRAN PRIX COLUMBI

YOU LEFT ME ALONE FOR TWO HOURS HAVE YOU GONE MAD?
PLEASE DON'T BE MAD, MAMA!

I FOLLOWED HIM TO HIPAZIA'S HOUSE IMAGINE, MAMA, HOW LUCKY HE WAS.
HIPAZIA'S HOUSE? WHAT'S HE DOING THERE? I DON'T GET IT HE KNOWS WHAT HE HAS TO DO, HE'S NOT NAIVE LIKE YOU ARE

TELL ME WAS HER HOUSE ALL LIT UP?
YES, MAMA

WELL THAT DOESN'T MATTER! YOU MUSN'T THINK ABOUT THAT HOUSE. PROMISE?
BUT MAMA, I CAN'T PROMISE THAT

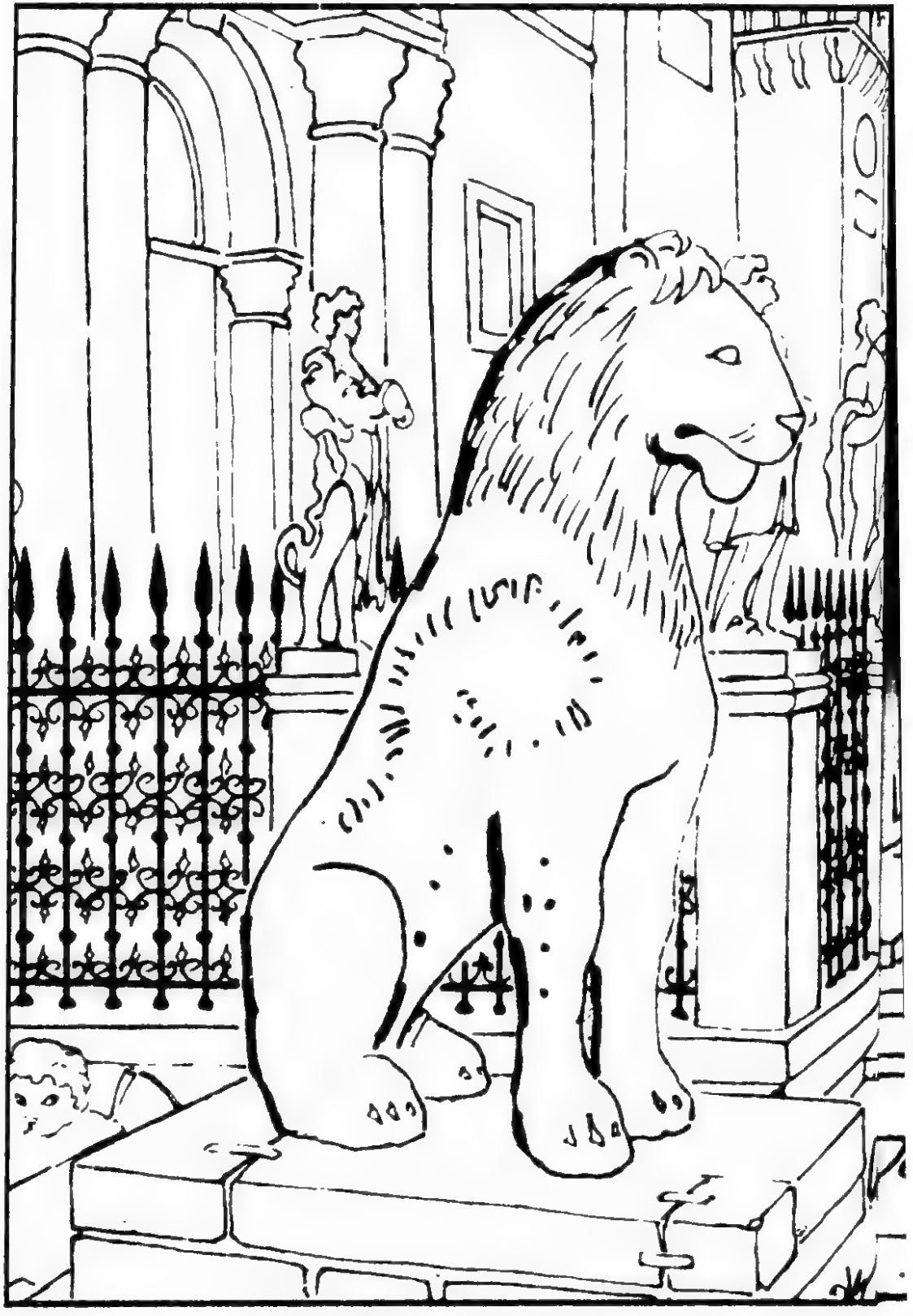
I LOVE HIPAZIA

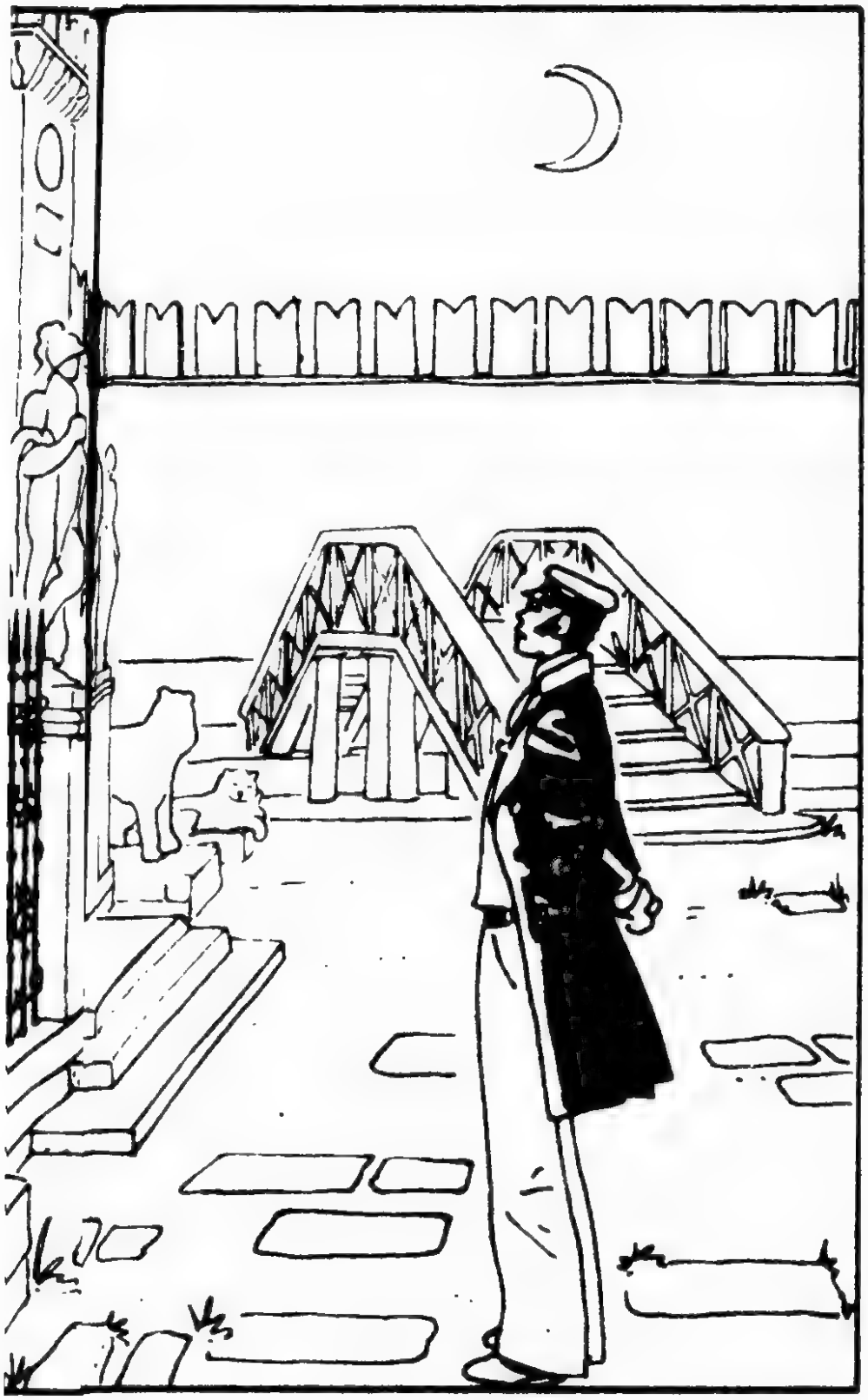
YOU LIKE IT WHEN I PUSH YOU FAST, DON'T YOU, MAMA

YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A CLAVICLE OF SOLOMON A MAGIC ONE?
YES, SOLOMON'S CLAVICLES ARE MAGIC BUT...

THEY ARE ALSO GEMS I THOUGHT YOU'D KNOW THAT. I'M LOOKING FOR A MAGIC ANCIENT EMERALD
MAGIC? YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC? AH, CORTO, TRUE MAGIC RESIDES IN LOVE AND HARMONY BUT WHAT LOVE, WHAT HARMONY? LOVE FOR ETERNAL BEAUTY, HARMONY THAT ENCOMPASSES THE UNIVERSE THE GREATER AND DEEPER THE SOUL ..
Ptatia
...THE LONGER IT TAKES TO DISCOVER ITSELF: TO KNOW YOURSELF BEYOND THE SHADOW OF A DOUBT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY MAGIC.
LISTEN, HIPAZIA--WHEN I WAS YOUNG I READ PLATO TOO, THOUGH NOT VERY DEEPLY BUT I CHOSE OTHER PATHS, OTHER PHILOSOPHIES AND OTHER DISCIPLINES RIGHT NOW I'M INTRIGUED BY SOMETHING ELSE
OH IT MIGHT INTRIGUE ME TOO CAN I HELP?
SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH, BARON CORVO SENT ME THIS RIDDLE "THE GREEK LION IS LOSING ITS NORTHERN SERPENT'S SKIN IN THE VENETIAN M STS"
BARON CORVO AGAIN, THAT'S STRANGE
BUT ARE THERE GREEK LIONS IN VENICE?
GREEK LIONS? WHAT COULD GREEK LION MEAN? PERHAPS THE MARBLE SCULPTURES THAT THE VENETIANS STOLE ON THE ISLANDS OF THE AEGEAN SEA AND BROUGHT BACK HERE TO BEAUTIFY THEIR CITY?
PERHAPS SO IF BARON CORVO WRO THIS TO ME IN HIS LAST LETTER, IT MUST HAVE MEANT SOMETHING IT COULD BE AN ALLUSION TO ONE OF THOSE MARBLE LIONS

GREEK MARBLE LIONS?
YES, IN MARBLE OR STONE, AND THAT LOSE THEIR "NORTHERN SERPENT'S SKIN IN THE VENETIAN MISTS."
BARON CORVO LIKED TO HAVE FUN AND PLAY TRICKS ON PEOPLE
HE PLAYED ONE ON HIMSELF ONCE, BUT THAT'S ANOTHER STORY
I AGREE WITH YOU BUT THIS MUST BE AN EXCEPTION.
I'M SURE HE WANTED TO SEND ME A MESSAGE. LOVELY CHESTNUT ROASTER YOU HAVE.
IT'S A COLLECTOR'S ITEM. LISTEN, CORTO, WHY DON'T YOU TRY THE ARSENAL IT HAS GREEK LIONS OUT FRONT
YES, THAT'S TRUE. THEY WERE SENT BY MOROSIN, THE PELOPONNESIAN FROM ATHENS, LATE IN THE YEAR 1600. THEY'RE VERY OLD... PERHAPS FROM THE NAXOS SCHOOL
THANKS FOR THE TIP. THERE'S A LOVELY TURKISH MOON TONIGHT.
IT'LL BE PLEASANT TO WALK HOME ON SUCH A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT. THANK YOU FOR YOUR KINDNESS.
DON'T FORGET WHERE I LIVE..
I'D LIKE TO CHAT WITH YOU TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR VOYAGES AND WHETHER YOUR SEARCH IS SUCCESSFUL. GOODBYE, CORTO MALTESE





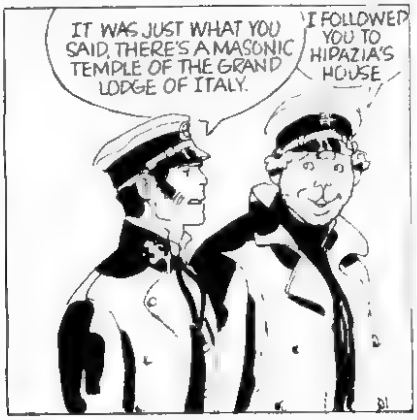
Chapter II

THERE WAS EVERY-THING IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN-CHICKEN LIVER, KIDNEYS, GROUND BEEF, GOLD-FISH, BOWLS OF MILK BUT THERE WAS ONE FOOD YOU COULDN'T EAT "THE FORBIDDEN FISHBONE," WHICH GREW

IN THE CENTER OF THIS WONDERFUL EARTHLY PARADISE ONE DAY MEOW, THE FIRST FEMALE CAT, MET THE DEVIL DISGUISED AS A MOUSE

CORTO!

BOEKE! YOU KEPT ME WAITING LONG ENOUGH!
SORRY, I HAD TAKE MY MOTH BACK HOME "T ME WHAT IT W


IT WAS JUST WHAT YOU SAID, THERE'S A MASONIC TEMPLE OF THE GRAND LODGE OF ITALY.
I FOLLOWED YOU TO HIPAZIA'S HOUSE

INTERESTING WOMAN ALMOST SEEMS TO BELONG TO A DIFFERENT TIME.
A DIFFERENT TIME MAYBE, BUT SHE SURE IS BEAUTIFUL.

DON'T YOU THINK SO?

YES, MAYBE SHE IS BUT WHEN YOU'RE AROUND HER, YOU DON'T THINK ABOUT IT.
I'M IN LOVE WITH HER, YOU KNOW.

YOU ARE?
YES, I AM I REALIZE I DON'T HAVE A PRAYER, I'M SO UGLY.

NO DOUBT ABOUT THAT, I'M NO GOOD LOOKER. IF I WERE LIKE YOU, IT'D BE DIFFERENT
BOEKE, BOEKE! WHAT'S ALL THIS?

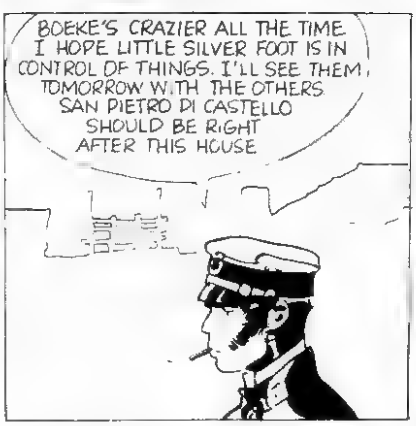
I CAME TO VENICE TO DO "BUSINESS" WITH YOU AND WITH THE "VENICE IDLERS," NOT TO LISTEN TO YOUR CHATTER PERSONALLY. I BET THAT GIRL CAN ONLY LOVE WHAT SHE CAN'T HAVE

SHE'S A STRANGE ONE. DIFFERENT FROM ANY WOMAN I'VE EVER KNOWN. BUT LET'S GET BACK TO BUSINESS. I'VE GOT TO FIND A CERTAIN SMALL ARAB FUNERARY STONE IN THE SAN PIETRO DI CASTELLO CHURCH. LEGEND SAYS THE SAINT USED IT AS A THRONE AT ANTIOCH.

AND THAT MAY BE WHY BARON CORVO USED TO VISIT THE CHURCH
I DON'T GET IT

I'M NOT SURE I GET IT EITHER. BUT IT'LL ALL COME TOGETHER IN TIME. SEE YOU TOMORROW
OKAY!

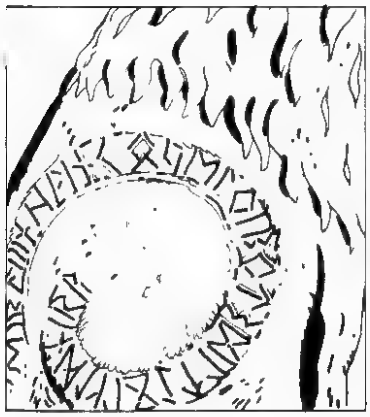
TOMORROW THEN


BOEKE'S CRAZIER ALL THE TIME. I HOPE LITTLE SILVER FOOT IS IN CONTROL OF THINGS. I'LL SEE THEM TOMORROW WITH THE OTHERS. SAN PIETRO DI CASTELLO SHOULD BE RIGHT AFTER THIS HOUSE

THERE IT IS!

MAYBE THE STONE'S IN HERE!

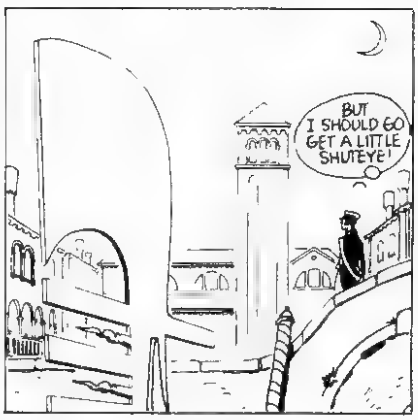
SIMON PETER'S THRONE OF ANTIOCH.
A MAGIC EMERALD THE ARAB FUNERARY STONE, ALSO CALLED SAINT PETER'S THRONE, THE MASONIC R L OF THE .L.: OF ITALY
BARON CORVO, LITTLE SILVER FOOT'S IDLERS, THE GREEK LIONS, THE NORTHERN SERPENTS SKIN, STEVANI, FALIERO, THE NEO-PLATONIST INGENUE HIPAZIA.
. THE CATS, VENICE AND ME WHAT A RIDDLE!
THIS IS THE ARSENAL WITH THE GREEK LIONS HIPAZIA AND BEPI FALIERO WERE TALKING ABOUT MAYBE BARON CORVO, TOO



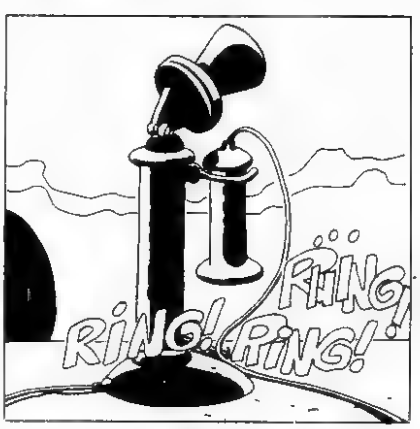
WEIRD! THOSE LOOK LIKE RUNIC CHARACTERS.

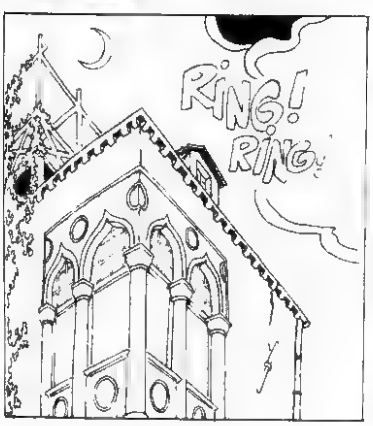
GREEK LIONS WITH A RUNIC INSCRIPTION. THIS CITY'S FULL OF SURPRISES.

ANYWAY, I HAVE TO SEE BARON CORVO'S WRITINGS, THE ONES IN STEVANI'S POSSESSION.


BUT I SHOULD GO GET A LITTLE SHUTEYE!

EVENING, SHARP-EYES I NEED TO GET TO MELCHISEDECH'S HOUSE IN THE OLD GHETTO. KNOW WHERE IT IS?
I KNOW HIS GRANDDAUGHTER ESTHER EVEN BETTER HOP IN!


RING! RING! RING!


RING! RING!

HELLO YES, THIS IS STEVANI FALIERO. ARE YOU NUTS? IT'S FIVE IN THE MORNING.

YES? CORTO MALTESE? BARON CORVO? I NEED TO KNOW THIS AT FIVE IN THE MORNING?

LISTEN THIS IS IMPORTANT.
NO, WAIT
YOU LISTEN TO ME! DON'T TRY TO PLAY SMART WHAT DO YOU AND CORTO WANT FROM ME? WHERE ARE YOU?
AT SCHULZ'S. BUT, LOOK-I NEED TO SEE YOU RIGHT AWAY...
WATCH IT, BEPI HE DOESN'T LIKE JOKES!
HE HUNG UP THAT'S ODD
STEVANI'S IN WITH THE SERENISSIMA AND THE SERENISSIMA'S DANGEROUS
IF I CONSIDERED EVERY RISK, I'D NEVER LEAVE HOME I'VE GOT A BUSINESS PROPOSITION FOR STEVANI.
YOU'RE CRAZY! STEVANI'S YOUR ENEMY.
SCHULZ
BUSINESS IS BUSINESS LISTEN, SCHULZ, YOU KNEW BARON CORVO. WHAT WAS HE LOOKING FOR AT SAN PIETRO DI CASTELLO?
OH HE WAS TRYING TO DECIPHER SOME ARAB WORDS
ENGRAVED ON A FUNERAL STONE CALLED "THE THRONE OF SAINT PETER" IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THE EPISCOPAL SEAT OF THE APOSTLE AT ANTIOCH BUT THE EARLIEST KNOWN ARABIC WRITING IS ON THE TOMB OF THE POET IMRU L-QUAYS FROM 328 A D
WHICH MEANS THERE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN ARABIC CHARACTERS ON SAINT PETER'S THRONE IN THE APOSTLE'S TIME
EXACTLY THAT'S WHY BARON CORVO WANTED TO DECODE THAT WRITING.
BUT WHAT WAS HE GETTING AT?
THAT I DON'T KNOW

HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE BET BETWEEN SIMON PETER AND SIMON THE MAGICIAN AT ANTIOCH?
NO, I'VE HEARD OF LOTS OF BETS, BUT NOT THAT ONE
THE TWO SIMONS AT ANTIOCH. WHERE DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THAT? FROM THE FREEMASONS OR MAYBE HIPAZIA? THAT MUST BE STEVANI
RING! RING! RING!
YES, FALIERO HERE
ALL RIGHT, COME TO MY HOUSE!
GOOD! STEVANI'S A SMART MAN AND WHEN THERE'S BUSINESS TO BE DONE, EVEN THE "SERENISSIMA" IS READY TO LISTEN. I'LL CALL YOU THIS EVENING
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "BUSINESS"?
OH, EMERALDS, GREEK LIONS, ARAB STONES AND SAILORS 'BYE SCHULZ SEE YOU LATER
YOU'RE CRAZY, BEPI. THIS'LL TURN OUT BADLY
YOU YOUNG FOOLS ARE ALWAYS AFTER THINGS YOU'LL NEVER FIND BETS BETWEEN SAINTS, EMERALDS, GREEK LIONS MADNESS ALL OF IT MADNESS!
MELCHISEDECH DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT A MAGIC EMERALD CALLED "SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE" THAT ONCE BELONGED TO SIMON THE MAGICIAN?
YES, IT WAS THE BARAKET OF THE RUBEN SATANAS TRIBE. THEIR FOUNDER GAVE IT TO LILITH FIRST WIFE OF ADAM, LATER WIFE OF CAIN. CAIN TOOK IT WHEN HE WISHED TO RECONQUER PARADISE. LOST BY HIS PARENTS A DANGEROUS GEM
IT WAS ONE OF THE GEMS IN SOLOMON'S BREASTPLATE. THE "URIM AND THUMMIM" SIMON THE MAGICIAN LOST IT TO THE APOSTLE SIMON PETER WHO GAVE IT TO SAINT MARK THE EVANGELIST, VENICE'S PATRON SAINT. FOLLOW ME?
YOU BET!

MARK THE EVANGELIST DIDN'T KNOW SOLOMON HAD GIVEN THE EMERALD TO HIS ARCHITECT, IRÂM, AS A REWARD FOR CONSTRUCTING THE TEMPLE OF GOD THAT'S WHY THE EMERALD WAS MAGIC, AND WHY IT HAD
I ADORE LEGENDS
MYSTERIOUS CHARACTERS ENGRAVED IN IT A SECRET MESSAGE FOR THE INITIATED BUT OF COURSE, CORTO, THIS IS JUST LEGEND!
HMMM LET'S SEE THE ENGRAVED CHARACTERS LOOKED LIKE MAGIC FORMULAE BUT GAVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR FINDING A TREASURE BELONGING TO SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA NOT KNOWING THIS, MARK LEFT FOR EGYPT
.. TO FOUND THE COPTIC CHURCH BUT HE WAS STRANGLED BY TWO ASSASSINS FROM A GNOSTIC SECT LINKED WITH SIMON THE MAGICIAN, WHO BROUGHT THE EMERALD TO ANTIOCH LATER, WHEN THE EMERALD WAS IN BASILIDE'S HANDS, HE TRANSFORMED IT INTO A GNOSTIC GEM OF THE ABRAXAS TYPE
MELCHISEDECH, DID YOU KNOW THERE ARE TWO SCULPTURES IN VENICE REPRESENTING THE GOD ABRAXAS?
YES, THERE'S ONE ON HIPAZIA'S HOUSE AND ONE ON THE R. L. HERMES TRISMEGISTUS AT THE GRAND LODGE OF ITALY BUT HOW DID YOU KNOW THAT?
JUST LUCKY BUT PLEASE, DON'T STOP
.. THEN THE EMERALD FELL INTO THE HANDS OF GAINIST HERETICS AND OTHER EGYPTIAN PHILOSOPHERS UNTIL THE ARABIAN CONQUEST OF ALEXANDRIA IN 641
.. THE ARAB CHIEFTAIN AMR IBN AL AS GAVE THE EMERALD TO HIS PRIESTS, WHO GUARDED IT UNTIL TWO VENETIAN MERCHANTS MANAGED TO STEAL IT ALONG WITH THE BODY OF MARK THE EVANGELIST. THEY TOOK IT BACK TO VENICE IN THE YEAR 828.
THEN WE LOSE THE TRAIL OF "SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE," THE MAGIC EMERALD THAT'S THE GEM'S HISTORY.
AND WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT SAINT PETER'S THRONE?
IT WAS AN ANCIENT JEWISH FUNERARY STELE THAT WAS LATER USED BY THE ARABS BE CAREFUL, CORTO
YOU'RE STIRRING UP THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN BURIED IN THE DUST OF HISTORY WITH MAGIC RITUALS AND SECRET INITIATION RITES. THIS IS DANGEROUS BUSINESS YOU'RE ONTO
I'LL BE CAREFUL. GOOD BYE, MELCHI-SEDECH!

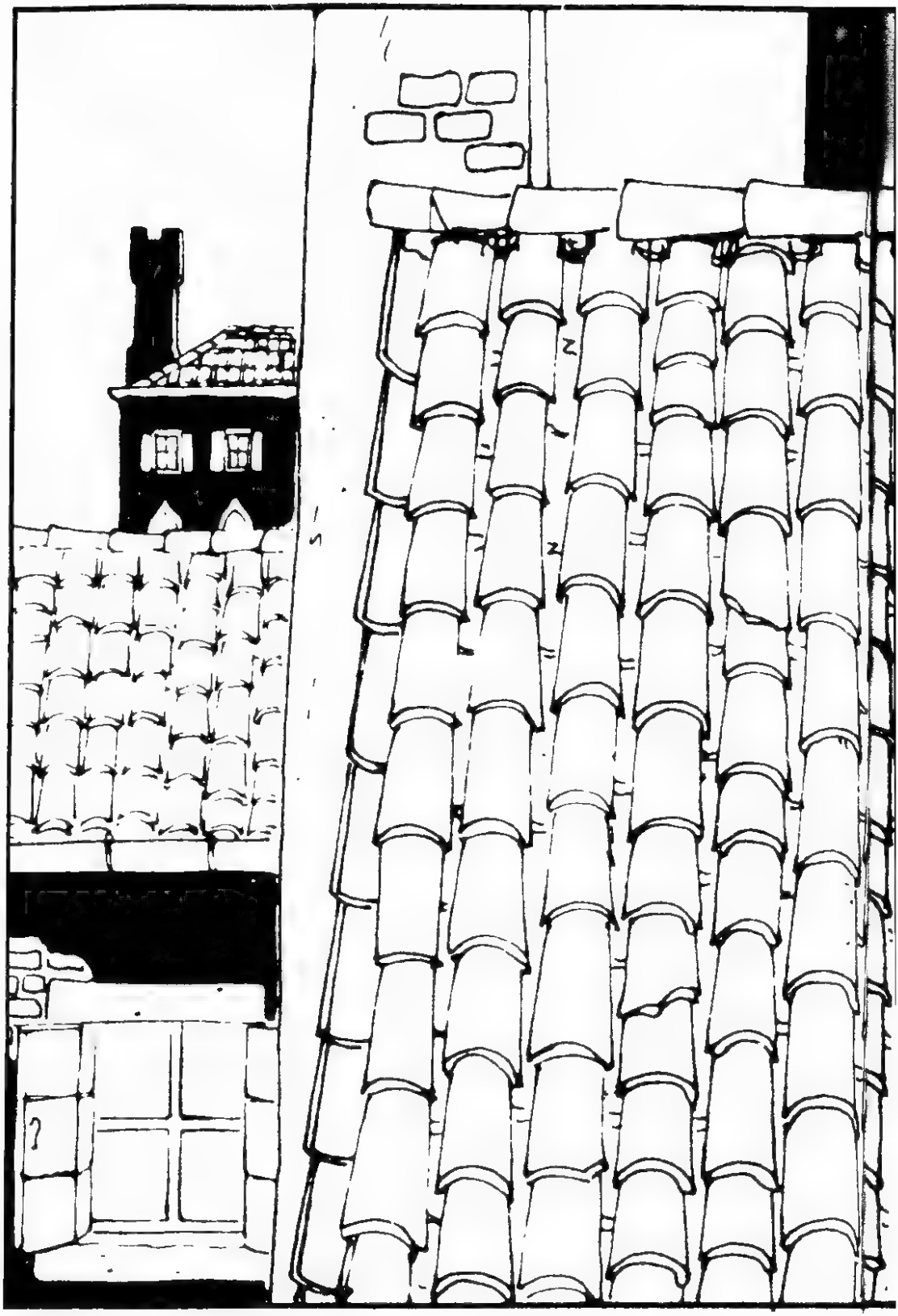
MEANWHILE...
WELL, WHAT ARE YOU PROPOSING. WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT BARON CORVO?
LISTEN, STEVANI
CORTO MALTESE IS LOOKING FOR A MAGIC EMERALD, AND FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, OR THINK I DO, THIS PRECIOUS STONE IS LINKED
TO A RIDDLE HE WAS GIVEN BY BARON CORVO, YOUR FATHER'S FRIEND
MY FATHER WAS A BIT DAFT, BUT IT'S TRUE HE WAS THAT ENGLISHMAN'S FRIEND I HAVE BARON CORVO'S DIARY
I STILL REMEMBER THE OLD MADMAN. HOW DOES THE RIDDLE GO?
THE GREEK LION LOSES ITS NORTHERN SERPENT'S SKIN IN THE VENETIAN MISTS...
HMMM DEFINITELY ONE OF HIS WILDER RAVINGS...OR MAYBE A PRACTICAL JOKE...
HERE'S A LETTER FROM BARON CORVO TO MY FATHER "DEAR STEVANI, YOU WERE RIGHT, THOSE CHARACTERS ON SAINT PETER'S STONE ARE NABATHEAN, FROM THE YEAR 300 A.D. BUT ON THE LEFT SIDE."
"THERE ARE ARAB CHARACTERS FROM MUCH LATER, PERHAPS 1000 A.D. THEY WERE HASTILY CHIPPED IN AND SIGNED BY IBN BATTUTA, ARAB GEOGRAPHER IN 1300. THEY READ AS FOLLOWS 'HAMIR BEN R'YOBAH, KNOWN AS THE CAMEL'."
AHA!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "AHA!"?
ER, AH NOTHING I JUST SAID "AHA!"
DON'T SAY IT AGAIN. I DON'T LIKE IT. LET'S GO ON. "HIS HOME IS IN THE CAMPO DEI MORI NEAR THE MADONNA DELL'ORTO. YOU'LL FIND MORE ABOUT THIS IN MY DIARY, IN THE CHAPTER SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH."
LET'S HAVE A LOOK. "SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH" MEANS FABLE OF VENICE, THE CODE NAME FOR THE OPERATIONS BETWEEN ARAB AGENTS IN VENICE AND THE NUMEROUS AL-QADI POLICE AGENTS IN ALEXANDRIA IN SEARCH OF THE STOLEN "SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE," A MAGIC EMERALD
CHRONOLOGY "828 - BUONO DE MALAMOCCO AND RUSTICO DA TORCELLO STEAL THE EMERALD AND HIDE IT."
" BENEATH THE CORPSE OF MARK THE EVANGELIST AND SOME PORK MEAT 830 - IBN FARID, THE FIRST ARAB AGENT SENT TO RECOVER THE EMERALD, IS STRANGLED. 850 - BEN WASIL OF CAIRO DIES IN PRISON IN VENICE. 893 - IBRAHIM ABU, A SICILIAN SARACEN, IS FOUND DEAD NEAR THE RIALTO."
" IN 904 SAUD KHALULA OF PALERMO, WITH THE AID OF HIS BLACK GUARDS, RECAPTURES SOLOMON'S EMERALD AND HIDES IT SOMEWHERE IN VENICE. SAUD KHALULA TRIED TO FLEE THE CITY BUT DROWNED IN THE CANAL OF THE MADONNA DELL'ORTO. FROM THEN ON, ALL TRACES OF 'SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE' HAVE BEEN LOST. IT IS PROBABLY STILL IN VENICE."

THERE'S STEVANI'S HOUSE MAYBE HE'D LET ME HAVE A GLANCE AT BARON CORVO'S DIARIES
CAN'T HURT TO ASK
AFTER ALL THE POET THOUGHT I SHOULD.
BANG! BANG!
TWO SHOTS THEY CAME FROM STEVANI'S HOUSE
THE DOOR'S OPEN HEY! ANYONE HERE?
NOBODY
GOOD GOD STEVANI!
WITH TWO NASTY WOUNDS WHO COULD'VE DONE THIS?
THE ARAB EMERALD ARABS IN VENICE BARON CORVO COURTYARD
THE COURTYARD HEY! DOWN THERE!

TOO LATE. I COULDN'T SEE WHO IT WAS, WAIT- WHAT'S THIS?
THE BOYS FROM THE SERENISSIMA!
AREN'T YOU THE SAILOR WE SAW LAST NIGHT?
HE SHOT STEVAN.
WHY DID YOU SHOOT STEVANI? HE MEANT NO HARM TO YOU!
KILL HIM, BOSELLI. LET'S NOT WASTE OUR TIME.
CRACK!
BANG! BANG!
I'LL BLOW YOU TO PIECES!
BANG!
BANG!

THE BASTARD JUMPED OUT THE WINDOW.
BANG!
WHERE'D HE GO? HE'S NOT BELOW
MAYBE HE GOT UP TO THE ROOF I'LL GO SEE
HEY! LOOK UP THERE!
I SEE HIM!

SOMEONE'S UP THERE!
LET'S GO!
HE MUST BE OVER THERE!
THERE WERE GUNSHOTS
NOTHING SERIOUS
NOTHING SERIOUS?! THIS MAN'S BEEN WOUNDED
A MAN NAMED CORTO MALTESE FIRED THE SHOTS
NO, IT WASN'T CORTO MALTESE! HE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.
THEN WHO SHOT YOU?
WHAT A DUMB QUESTION! I'LL NEVER TELL YOU I PREFER MY OWN FORM OF VENGEANCE
WE COULD CHARGE YOU WITH FAILURE TO REPORT THE USE OF ILLEGAL FIREARMS AND WORSE. STAY HERE I'M GOING UP TO THE ROOF
BANG!
ANOTHER GUNSHOT VENICE IS GETTING DOWNRIGHT DANGEROUS!



MAYBE I CAN GET DOWN VIA THIS BALCONY
BOSELLI'S SHOT GRAZED MY SIDE.
NOTHING SERIOUS, FORTUNATELY
SLAM
TOCK
ONCE AGAIN I'M AIRBORNE
HOPE I DON'T FALL INTO ANOTHER MASONIC LODGE
WHAT A WEIRD FEELING
FEELS LIKE I'M FALLING UPWARD
THIS IS BEAUTIFUL. ALL THESE REFLECTIONS OFF THE WATER LIKE ARABIC CHARACTERS!
بسم الله الرحمن

WHAT DID I FALL INTO? WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
"SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH"
I'VE READ THAT PHRASE SOMEWHERE BUT WHERE?
THE HAND OF FATIMA, WITH THE SYMBOLS OF THE SARACEN BLACK GUARDS
WHAT'S THIS? COULD BE AN ALADDIN'S LAMP..
BUT THEN IT COULD JUST BE A MILK BOTTLE FROM "THE VENICE DAIRY CO"
THIS SEAL WITH THE LION OF SAINT MARK THE EVANGELIST MEANS DANGER OR WAR I WONDER WHAT IT'S DOING ON THIS BOTTLE?
THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING!?
HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW!
RASPUTIN? WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU DOING IN VENICE?
MY NAME'S NOT RASPUTIN I AM SAUD KHALULA...
NOW, WHO ARE YOU?
MY NAME'S CORTO MALTESE I'M A SAILOR

A SAILOR? GOOD, GOOD I USED TO KNOW A SAILOR NAME WAS SINBAD OF BASRA YOU KNOW HIM?
SURE DO HE'S ONE OF MY ANCESTORS
NOW LISTEN, RASPUTIN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THIS LEGEND DISGUISED AS A GENIE?
MY NAME'S SAUD KHALULA, NOT RASPUTIN!
KHALULA?.. SAUD KHALULA
YES, THAT'S ME! THE ONE WHO FOUND THE MAGIC EMERALD
AND HID IT IN A SECRET SPOT IN THE FONTEGO DEI ARABI IN SAN MARCILIANO! HAW! HAW! THE VENETIANS WILL NEVER FIND IT!
SAN MARCILIANO?
YES, I SENT A DRAWING OF THE EXACT SPOT BY FELUCCA TO ALEXANDRIA, IN EGYPT
AND EVERYTHING WOULD'VE BEEN FINE EXCEPT THOSE BLOODY BYZANTINE POLICE
DECIDED TO INSPECT OUR SHIP
THEY GOT HOLD OF THE SECRET MESSAGE.
MAY GOD CRUSH BYZANTINES TO DUST! NEST OF VIPERS!
YOU COULD DRAW ANOTHER ONE
DRAW ANOTHER ONE. HAW! HAW! HAW! MAY THE PROPHET SMASH YOU YOU'RE MAD!
WHY?
WHY? WHY SHOULD I, IS THE QUESTION!

NOW I CAN GO BACK TO THE HOUSE IN SAN MARCILIANO AND TAKE BACK THE EMERALD MYSELF
LISTEN SAUD KHALULA HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN SHUT UP IN THAT BOTTLE, OR LAMP?
SHUT UP IN A MILK BOTTLE! AH! I REMEMBER IT WAS SAINT MARK THE EVANGELIST
. WHO SHUT ME UP IN THERE BUT LUCKILY, YOU'VE OPENED IT
LET'S GO GET THE EMERALD! COME ON!
BUT SAUD
SEVERAL CENTURIES HAVE GONE BY, AND A LOT HAS CHANGED SINCE THEN VENICE HAS CHANGED MAYBE THE HOUSE WHERE YOU HID "SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE" DOESN'T EXIST ANYMORE
ENOUGH TRAITOR! BLACK GUARDS, APPEAR!
DEATH TO THE CURSED BYZANTINE!
ER JUST A MINUTE GUYS I'M NOT A CURSED BYZANTINE THERE'S SOME MISTAKE
CORRUPT BYZANTINE OR SCHEMING VENETIAN, IT'S ALL THE SAME TO US AND THAT'S YOUR TOUGH LUCK
BUT
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY OUT OF THIS
THERE I WAKE UP, AND NO MORE WILD DREAM SO LONG KHALULA!

AT LAST!
YOU'RE AWAKE. YOU'VE SLEPT FOR THREE DAYS. YOU WERE DREAMING EVEN DELIRIOUS YOU SPOKE IN YOUR SLEEP ABOUT GREEK LIONS, RASPUTIN, ARABS... YOUR FEVER'S GONE DOWN. OH, YES. I'M LOUISE.
LOUISE BROOKSZOWYC, FROM WARSAW THEY CALL ME SANT'AMBROGIOS, THE BELLE OF MILAN
NICE NAME, BUT
WHAT AM I DOING HERE? WHERE AM I?
WELL, YOU'RE IN MY HOUSE, AND I'M A FRIEND OF LITTLE SILVER FOOT
LITTLE SILVER FOOT DO YOU KNOW HER SON, BOEKE, TOO? I WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET HIM BUT I FELL INTO A CANAL
NOT INTO A CANAL YOU FELL ONTO THE BALCONY OF A FRIEND WHO TOLD BOEKE AND THEN BROUGHT YOU HERE
LUCKILY, THE POLICE DON'T KNOW

SORRY, BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED TO STEVANI?
OH, YES.
HE'S IN THE HOSPITAL, OUT OF DANGER. HE TOLD THEM YOU WEREN'T THE ONE WHO SHOT HIM.
OF COURSE IT WASN'T ME. I JUST WANTED TO ASK HIM ABOUT A DIARY
THE DIARY OF THE FAMOUS BARON CORVO? THE NEWSPAPERS MENTIONED IT. THEY SAY IT DISAPPEARED OR WAS STOLEN BY WHOEVER SHOT STEVANI, AND PROBABLY SHOT THE GUARD!
YES. A GUARD WAS KILLED TOO, THAT NIGHT. BEFORE HE DIED, HE SAID A WOMAN SHOT HIM.
A WOMAN? THAT'S ODD. I DIDN'T SEE A WOMAN AT STEVANI'S...
I LOOKED INTO THE COURTYARD AND THOUGHT I SAW A MAN RUNNING AWAY. BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN A WOMAN
THE GUARD WAS KILLED ON THE WAY TO THE ROOF BY A BULLET FROM THE SAME GUN THAT SHOT STEVANI
YOU'RE A REGULAR SHERLOCK HOLMES.
NO. BUT I READ CAREFULLY AND HAVE A GOOD MEMORY. YOUR HEAD, ON THE OTHER HAND, MUST BE TOTALLY JUMBLED. YOU RAVED ABOUT SO MANY THINGS
YOU KEPT REPEATING SOME KIND OF RIDDLE. IT DIDN'T MAKE MUCH SENSE
WHAT LUCK TO FIND A FRIEND LIKE YOU
BUT I DON'T WANT TO BE A BURDEN ON YOU. I'LL TRY TO LEAVE TONIGHT. TELL LITTLE SILVER FOOT
OH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT. I'LL BE LEAVING SOON FOR ROSARIO IN ARGENTINA
ARGENTINA? I'VE BEEN THERE. IT'S VERY BEAUTIFUL
THAT'S GOOD. I'LL BE WORKING FOR A POLISH GROUP, THE "WARSAVIA"
KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

HIPATIA
HI, LITTLE SILVER FOOT. OUR FRIEND SEEMS TO BE DOING FINE.
HELLO, "BELLE"...
GOOD WORK, "BELLE" YOU'VE BEEN A GREAT HELP TO US.
LITTLE SILVER FOOT AND BOEKE WHAT A NICE SURPRISE!
YOU'RE LOOKING GOOD, CORTO. BOY, HAVE YOU BEEN LUCKY

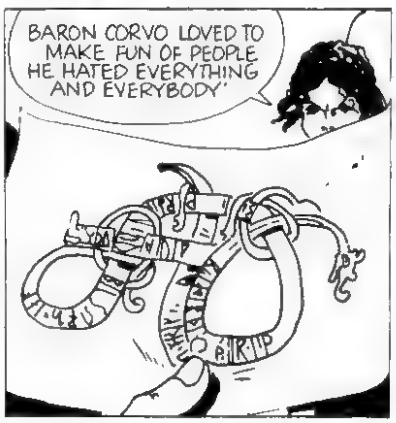
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO HIDE OUT FOR A WHILE THE CARABINIERI ARE LOOKING FOR YOU
I CAN'T STAY IN HIDING FOREVER WE'LL SEE WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE CARABINIERI WHEN I RUN INTO THEM

YOU'RE AS COCKSURE AS EVER BUT BE CAREFUL, CORTO, DON'T TAKE YOUR LUCKY STAR FOR GRANTED. ARE YOU SURE THIS EMERALD WE'RE LOOKING FOR WON'T BRING US BAD LUCK?

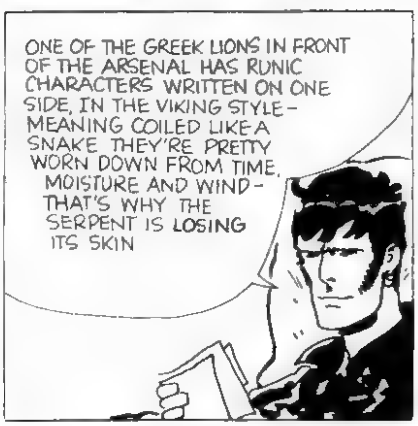
WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU? NOW YOU'RE SUPERSTITIOUS? WE'RE ON THE VERGE OF SOLVING THE RIDDLE OF "SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE"! WE CAN'T GIVE UP NOW!

WHEN BARON CORVO CHALLENGED ME TO FIND THAT EMERALD HE GAVE ME A FEW HINTS ABOUT SAINT PETER'S THRONE, SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH, SAN MARCILIANO, KHALULA.

THE BLACK GUARDS, THE "FONTEGO DEGLI ARABI" WHICH HAS BELONGED TO THE MASONS FOR THE LAST SEVERAL CENTURIES, BUT BEFORE THAT BELONGED TO A MONASTIC MILITARY ORDER, THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS AND ONE VERY HARD RIDDLE

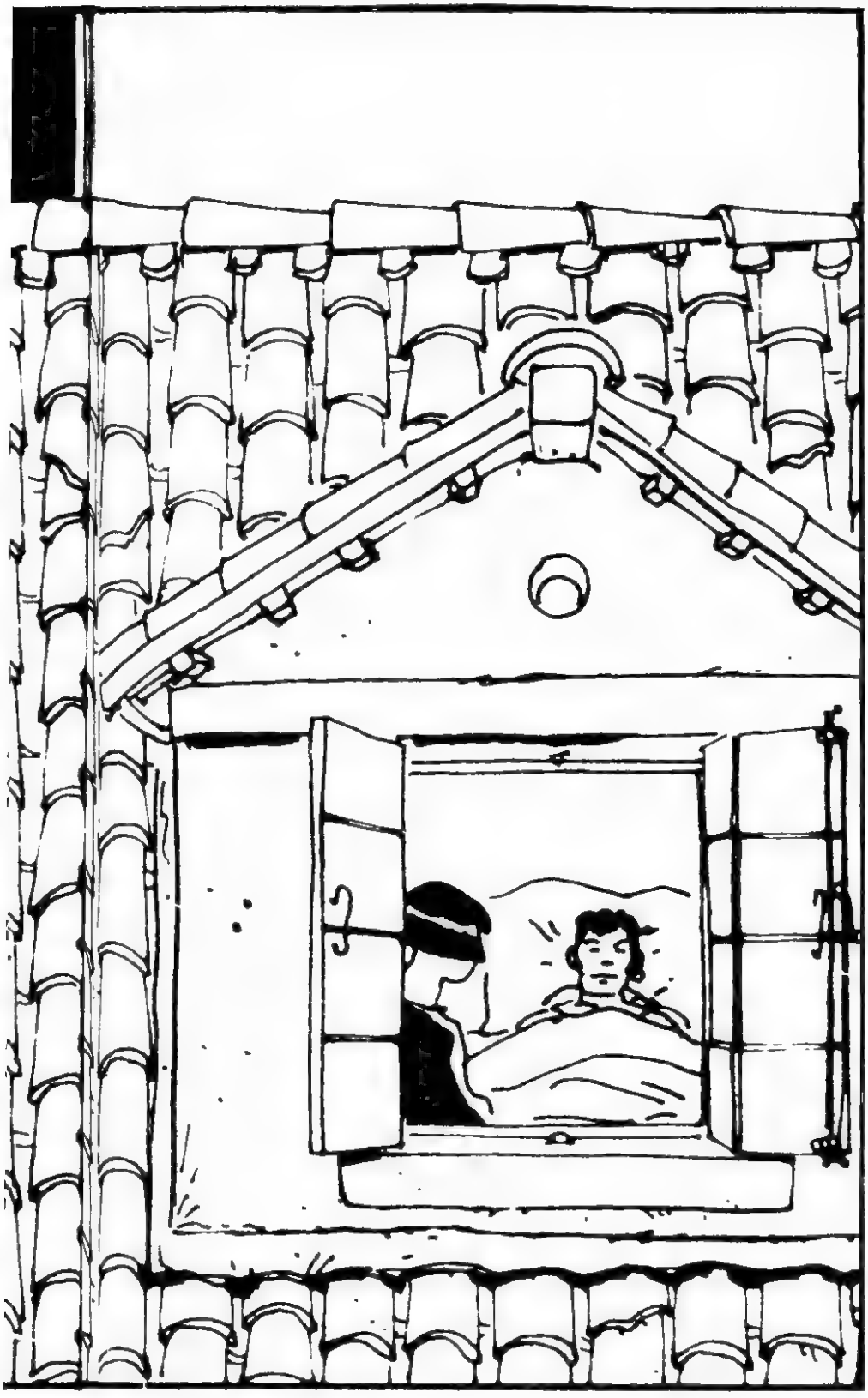

BARON CORVO LOVED TO MAKE FUN OF PEOPLE HE HATED EVERYTHING AND EVERYBODY.
R.I.P.

THAT'S NOT TRUE. IF YOU KNEW HIM, YOU'D KNOW HE WAS A VERY LONELY MAN.. BUT THAT'S NOT THE POINT I THINK I KNOW WHAT HE WAS GETTING AT IN THIS RIDDLE. "THE GREEK LION LOSES ITS NORTHERN SERPENTS SKIN IN THE VENETIAN MISTS"

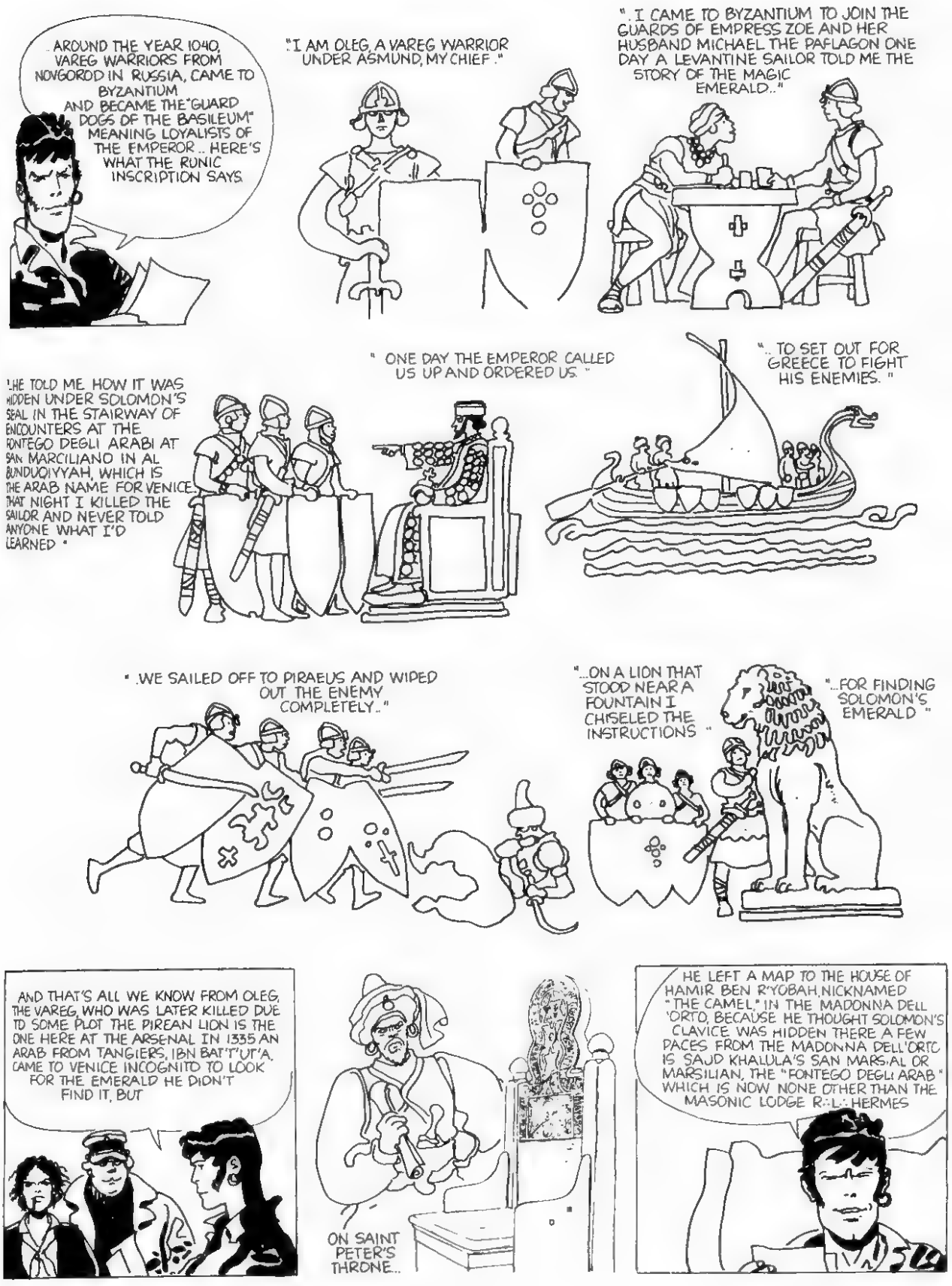

ONE OF THE GREEK LIONS IN FRONT OF THE ARSENAL HAS RUNIC CHARACTERS WRITTEN ON ONE SIDE, IN THE VIKING STYLE - MEANING COILED LIKE A SNAKE. THEY'RE PRETTY WORN DOWN FROM TIME, MOISTURE AND WIND - THAT'S WHY THE SERPENT IS LOSING ITS SKIN

I COPIED DOWN THE RUNES AND MELCHISEDECH, WHO'S AN EXPERT ON ANCIENT WRITINGS, DECIPHERED THEM. THEY TELL AN AMAZING STORY, ALMOST AN UNBELIEVABLE ONE, ABOUT THE LATER HISTORY OF THE MAGIC EMERALD, "SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE." LISTEN

THE STAIRWAY OF ENCOUNTERS



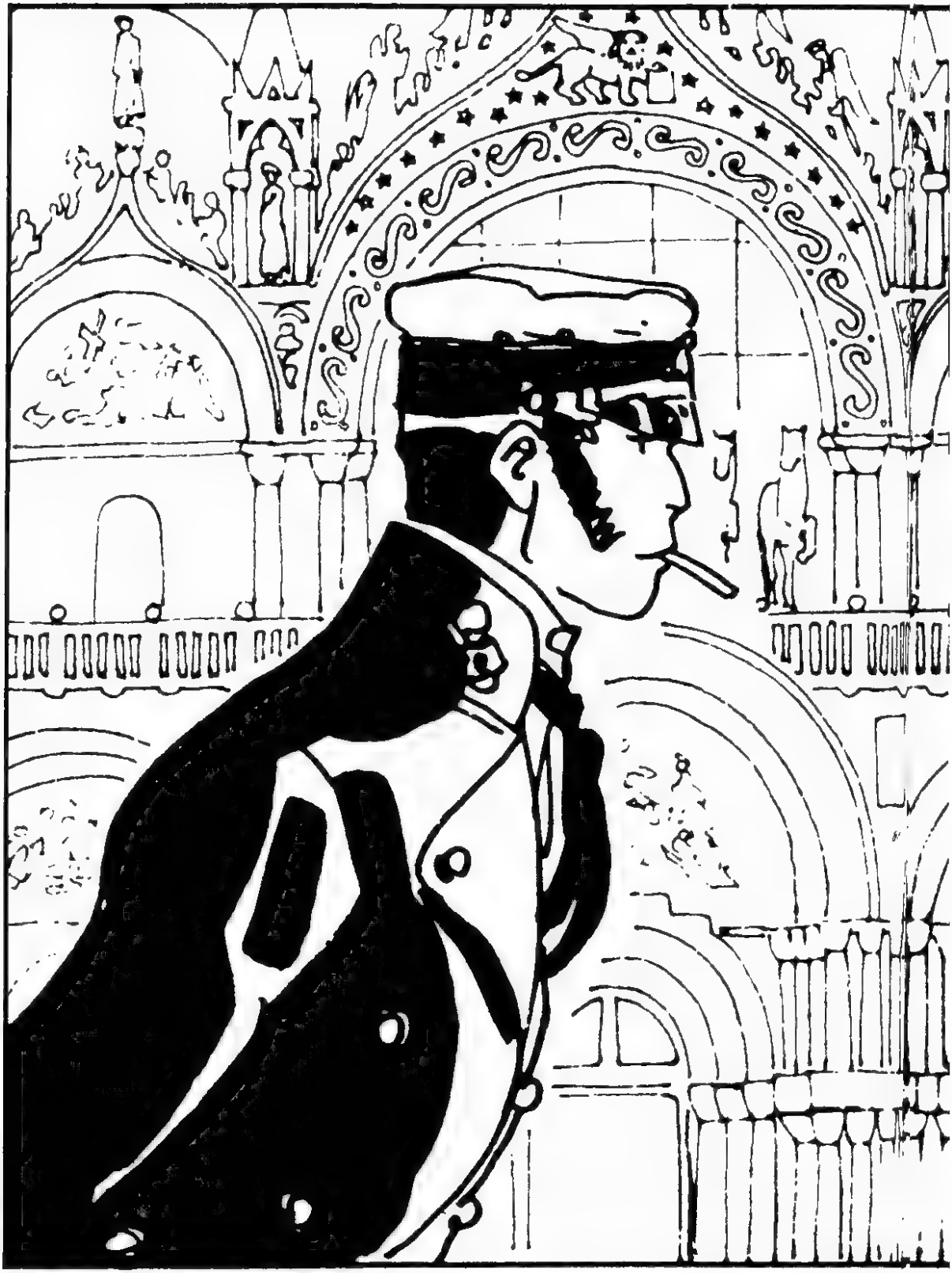
Chapter III

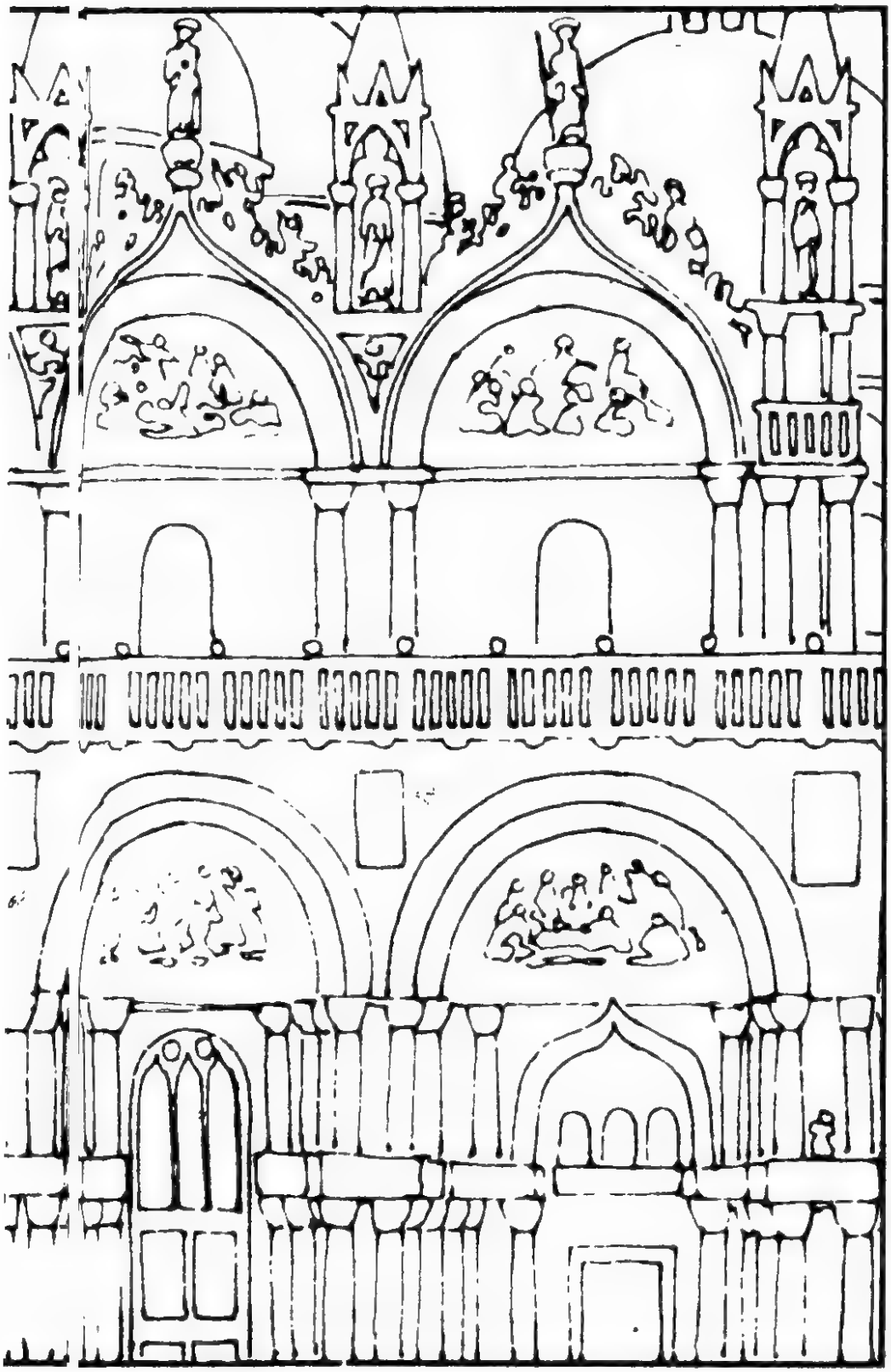

AROUND THE YEAR 1040, VAREG WARRIORS FROM NOVGOROD IN RUSSIA, CAME TO BYZANTIUM AND BECAME THE "GUARD DOGS OF THE BASILEUM" MEANING LOYALISTS OF THE EMPEROR.. HERE'S WHAT THE RUNIC INSCRIPTION SAYS
"I AM OLEG, A VAREG WARRIOR UNDER ASMUND, MY CHIEF."
"..I CAME TO BYZANTIUM TO JOIN THE GUARDS OF EMPRESS ZOE AND HER HUSBAND MICHAEL THE PAFLAGON ONE DAY A LEVANTINE SAILOR TOLD ME THE STORY OF THE MAGIC EMERALD.."
"..HE TOLD ME HOW IT WAS HIDDEN UNDER SOLOMON'S SEAL IN THE STAIRWAY OF ENCOUNTERS AT THE PONTEGO DEGLI ARABI AT SAN MARCILIANO IN AL BUNDUQIYYAH, WHICH IS THE ARAB NAME FOR VENICE. THAT NIGHT I KILLED THE SAILOR AND NEVER TOLD ANYONE WHAT I'D LEARNED."
"ONE DAY THE EMPEROR CALLED US UP AND ORDERED US."
"..TO SET OUT FOR GREECE TO FIGHT HIS ENEMIES."
"..WE SAILED OFF TO PIRAEUS AND WIPED OUT THE ENEMY COMPLETELY.."
"...ON A LION THAT STOOD NEAR A FOUNTAIN I CHISELED THE INSTRUCTIONS"
"...FOR FINDING SOLOMON'S EMERALD"
AND THAT'S ALL WE KNOW FROM OLEG, THE VAREG, WHO WAS LATER KILLED DUE TO SOME PLOT. THE PIREAN LION IS THE ONE HERE AT THE ARSENAL IN 1335 AN ARAB FROM TANGIERS, IBN BAT'T'UT'A, CAME TO VENICE INCOGNITO TO LOOK FOR THE EMERALD. HE DIDN'T FIND IT, BUT
ON SAINT PETER'S THRONE..
HE LEFT A MAP TO THE HOUSE OF HAMIR BEN R'YOBAH, NICKNAMED "THE CAMEL," IN THE MADONNA DELL 'ORTO, BECAUSE HE THOUGHT SOLOMON'S CLAVICE WAS HIDDEN THERE A FEW PACES FROM THE MADONNA DELL'ORTO IS SAUD KHALULA'S SAN MARSIAL OR MARSILIAN, THE "PONTEGO DEGLI ARAB" WHICH IS NOW NONE OTHER THAN THE MASONIC LODGE R∴L∴ HERMES

THE SAME NIGHT, ACROSS TOWN...
TAKE HEED OF THE WORK THAT IS TO BE DONE, NOT ONLY OF THE BENEFITS YOU WILL REAP
YOU WORK NOT ONLY FOR THE END PRODUCT BUT FOR THE PRIDE IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENT AS WELL. BE TRUE TO YOURSELVES IN VICTORY.
AS IN DEFEAT. BE STRONG! THE INITIATION TEACHINGS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED. THE "AWAKENING TO CONSCIOUSNESS" SHALL BEGIN.
IT IS COMPOSED OF SUCCESSIVE STAGES IN EACH STAGE YOU DISCOVER THE KEY TO THE NEXT DOOR
. BUT IN THESE TIMES, WE MUST BE MORE FLEXIBLE WITH OUR APPRENTICES...I'M TALKING TO YOU, BROTHER DOROME
AND MORE RIGOROUS, AS WELL, WHEN CALLED TO ATTEND A BROTHER'S PASSAGE TO THE RANK OF MASTER. DON'T YOU AGREE, BROTHER SVEDESIN?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND, BROTHER SCARPETTON.
OH, YES YOU DO UNDERSTAND, SVEDESIN. NO ONE'S MORE BLIND THAN HE WHO DOES NOT WANT TO SEE. BEAR IN MIND THAT TRUTH IS NOT UNDERSTOOD, TRUTH IS ABSORBED!
Knock! Knock! Knock!
WHAT? PSHHHT. WHO? PSHHHT PSHHT YES, AH PSSHT YES, BUT
BROTHER DEACON, I'M TOLD THAT THE LAYMAN CORTO MALTESE WISHES TO SPEAK TO YOU!

...LET THE LAYMAN CORTO MALTESE HAVE THE COURTESY TO WAIT IN THE HALL OF LOST STEPS UNTIL OUR ARCHITECTONIC WORK IS FINISHED..
LATER
DID HE SAY WHAT HE WANTED?
NO, HE JUST ASKED TO SPEAK WITH THE "SECRET MASTER"
GOOD EVENING, LAYMAN. WHY DO YOU WANT TO SPEAK TO THE "SECRET MASTER?"
GOOD EVENING PLEASE FORGIVE MY INTRUSION. BUT I THINK YOU MAY BE IN DANGER.
I HAVE MY OWN MOTIVES, TOO, OBVIOUSLY BECAUSE I'M SUSPECTED OF ATTEMPTED MURDER..
IN THE STEVANI AFFAIR?
EXACTLY. THE STEVANI AFFAIR I FOUND SOMETHING AT HIS HOUSE THAT CONCERNS YOU WHO SHOULD I SPEAK TO?
COME WITH ME!
TIMES ARE HARD
AS WE SAID THE OTHER DAY!
WE DID? I FORGOT.. THIS WAY PLEASE!
THESE SCULPTURES ON THESE STEPS ARE STRANGE
THESE SCULPTURES REPRESENT THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS WHO FOUGHT THE GENOESE ALONGSIDE THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AND THE VENETIANS IN 1256 IN GRATITUDE, THE REPUBLIC GAVE THEM THIS ANCIENT "FONTEGO DEGLI ARABI." THIS STAIRWAY IS CALLED THE STAIRWAY OF ENCOUNTERS.
THE STAIRWAY OF ENCOUNTERS?
YES, LEGEND HAS IT THAT EVERY YEAR AROUND THE 24TH AND 25TH OF APRIL, ONE CAN HAVE SOME STRANGE ENCOUNTERS HERE..
BROTHER THEON. THE LAYMAN CORTO MALTESE HAS SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO SAY TO YOU
IT IS NOT FOR US TO DECIDE WHAT IS IMPORTANT
ONLY THE "GREAT ARCHITECT OF THE UNIVERE" CAN DO THAT. BUT LET US HEAR CORTO MALTESE. HIS COMING HAS BEEN FORETOLD BY THE STAR ALDEBARAN.

WELL? WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT? WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME I MUST OBSERVE CASTOR AND POLLUX.
CASTOR AND POLLUX CAN WAIT I CAN'T. WOULD YOU PLEASE LOOK AT THIS INSIGNIA AND TELL ME WHAT IT MEANS?
IT'S ONE OF THE DEGREES OF PERFECTION IN THE LODGE. PROVOST AND JUDGE IN THE IRISH ORDER YOU HARDLY EVER SEE THESE ANYMORE
IT'S AN INTERMEDIATE DEGREE BETWEEN A MINOR SECRET SOCIETY AND A SUPERIOR ONE. THEIR MEMBERSHIP IS COMPLETELY CLANDESTINE
AND THE MAJORITY OF LAYMEN DON'T KNOW OF THEIR EXISTENCE
EXACTLY A SOCIETY THE BASIC "SECRET SOCIETIES" DON'T KNOW ABOUT, AND THE INTERMEDIATES WON'T TALK ABOUT WHERE DID YOU GET THIS?
I FOUND IT NEXT TO STEVANI I'D I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHO LOST IT!
DON'T BE NAIVE, CAPTAIN A MASON WOULD NOT BETRAY
A BROTHER LET ME GIVE YOU A BIT OF ADVICE UNLAWFUL POSSESSION OF THAT INSIGNIA MEANS.
YOU'LL BE THE TARGET OF THE HARSHEST SANCTIONS. IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW YOU CAME BY IT YOU'D BE BEST OFF TO BURN IT AND NEVER SPEAK OF IT. WE CAN REMOVE YOU FROM SUSPICION IN THE STEVANI CASE.
Mûladhâra
Svâdhishthâna
THANKS I'M CURIOUS IS ALL ALWAYS GETS ME INTO TROUBLE, BUT I CAN'T HELP IT
A GRAVE ERROR, CORTO MALTESE! HAVEN'T YOU EVER HEARD OF SECRET POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS?
OF COURSE THE "ILLUMINATI OF BAVARIA," THE "HOLY VEMA," THE "TEUTONIC ORDER," THE "FIREFLY SOCIETY," THE "PROTOCOLS OF ZION," THE "MYSTERY OF MYSTERIES," THE "UNDERGROUND KINGDOM OF THE AGHARTES" AND THE WORD "OM."
MY WORD! YOU ARE AN INITIATE
NO! JUST WELL INFORMED I DON'T BELIEVE IN DOGMAS, OR FLAGS.
YOU'RE A STRANGE MAN WE'LL TRY TO HELP YOU, CORTO MALTESE
EXCUSE ME, FATHER I HEARD CAPTAIN CORTO MALTESE WAS HERE





Chapter IV

YES WE'VE BEEN HAVING A LITTLE TALK BUT I MUST GET BACK TO THE STARS I'LL LEAVE CORTO MALTESE IN YOUR COMPANY ...
GOOD NIGHT FATHER
GOOD-BYE, CORTO MALTESE. DON'T FORGET WHAT I TOLD YOU THE WORLDWIDE ORGANIZATION HAS IRONCLAD LAWS!
I MUST PREPARE A HOROSCOPE FOR A GERMAN FRIEND
Z
WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? HOW AM I LOOKING AT YOU?
YOUR EYES ARE SCRUTINIZING ME.
YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT. IN A WAY I'M SCRUTINIZING MY MEMORY. YOU REMIND ME OF SOMEONE
WHO?
A GIRL WHO'S SEVERAL CENTURIES OLD
HIPATIA, NEO-PLATONIST PHILOSOPHER, DIRECTOR OF THE ALEXANDRIAN SCHOOL IN EGYPT WITH RARE BEAUTY AND A PURE, FLAWLESS CHARACTER.
THANK YOU
HOLD ON I SHOULD SPECIFY THAT IT'S YOUR NAME THAT REMINDS ME OF THE REAL HIPATIA. SHE WAS A MERCILESS ENEMY OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WAS KILLED FOR IT, IN A CHURCH
I AM THAT VERY HYPATIA
WHAT? I DON'T UNDERSTAND
I AM THAT HIPATIA. MEANING I'M HER REINCARNATION. WHAT'S THE MATTER? DON'T YOU BELIEVE ME?
TO BE HONEST, I'M SOMETHING OF A SKEPTIC ABOUT REINCARNATION.
IT DOESN'T MATTER. THE WOMAN DISCIPLE OF AMMONIOS SACCAS, OF PLOTINUS AND PROCLUS, LIVES AGAIN IN ME. BUT WHAT DID YOU WANT WITH MY FATHER? CAN I BE OF HELP TO YOU?
I'M LOOKING FOR A MASON WHO IMPLICATED ME IN A MURDER ATTEMPT AND WHO, I SUSPECT, HAS BETRAYED HIS BROTHERS

THE PERSON WHO WOUNDED STEVANI AND STOLE BARON CORVO'S DIARY SEEMS TO HAVE LEFT SOMETHING BEHIND
THAT LEADS ME TO BELIEVE HE'S CONNECTED WITH THE "INSTITUTION" THAT'S WHY I'M HERE.
AH, I SEE. YOU'RE MIXED UP IN SOME NASTY BUSINESS
BUT WHAT MAKES YOU THINK HE'S A MEMBER OF THE "INSTITUTION"? THE NEWSPAPERS MENTIONED A WOMAN SHE SEEMS TO BE THE ONE.
SO IT WOULD SEEM. WELL, HIPAZIA, I HAVE TO GO BUT I HAVE A FEELING WE'LL MEET AGAIN
THAT'S POSSIBLE MY FRIEND YOU'RE ALWAYS WELCOME GOOD-BYE'
SOLOMON'S SEAL! THE MAGIC EMERALD IS BEHIND IT!
BROTHER! I'M ON THE VERGE OF SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF THE EMERALD AND I CAN'T TAKE THE LAST STEP!

WHY DID YOU TRY TO KILL ME?
TOO MANY OF US AFTER THE EMERALD YOU'RE THE MOST DANGEROUS
TO MANY OF US? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
YEAH YOU KNOW STEVANI, YOU, ME, AND WHOEVER FIRED ON STEVANI THE OTHER DAY
WHEN I WENT TO SEE HIM TO LOOK AT BARON CORVO'S DIARY, SOMEONE CAME IN OR WAS ALREADY THERE AND SHOT AT US. SAME ONE THAT SHOT THE GUARD LATER ON
I WAS THERE THAT MORNING, TOO I LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW AND SAW YOU RUNNING THROUGH THE GARDEN, WHERE YOU HID BARON CORVO'S DIARY
I'M NOT THE ONE WHO STOLE IT.
I DON'T CARE ABOUT IT ANYMORE. I FOLLOWED YOU TO THE SECRET MASTER AND LISTENED TO WHAT YOU SAID. THE INSIGNIA YOU FOUND NEAR STEVANI BELONGS TO THE REAL CRIMINAL
AND WHO IS THAT?
I CAN'T TELL YOU ANYTHING EXCEPT THAT A MASON NEVER BETRAYS HIS BROTHERS I CAN TELL YOU, THOUGH
THAT THE GUILTY ONE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW HE'S GUILTY. HE ACTED IN GOOD FAITH. DID YOU FIND THE EMERALD'S HIDING PLACE?
YES!
BUT I WON'T TELL YOU
WHY NOT?
JUST TO BE MEAN!

PFFEEE
I WAS GETTING WORRIED EVERYTHING'S GOING FINE, EXCEPT FOR THIS DEAD GUY WHO IS IT?
BEPI FALIERO HE TRIED TO KILL ME WHERE'S LITTLE SILVER FOOT?
SHE'S IN THE POSTE VECIA AT FULVIO'S PLACE SHE'S WAITING FOR US WITH THE "VENICE RIFFRAFF" DID YOU FIND THE EMERALD?
YES IT'S RIGHT THERE BEHIND SOLOMON'S SEAL IN THE "STAIRWAY OF ENCOUNTERS."
WHAT? IN THIS STAIRWAY? SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? LET'S GET IT!
HANG ON LET'S SAVOR THE MOMENT FIRST, HOW ABOUT A CIGARETTE?
YOU'RE RIGHT!
HELP ME HIDE FALIERO'S BODY THEN WE'LL WAIT TILL IT'S DARK
TELL ME SOMETHING, BOEKE WHY DOES YOUR MOTHER HAVE THAT SILVER LEG?
OH, THAT'S QUITE A LOVE STORY!
UNTIL THIS METALWORKER FELL IN LOVE WITH HER, MY MOTHER HAD A WOODEN LEG
AH SHE MUST FEEL A LOT MORE STYLISH WITH THAT SILVER LEG!
WELL IT'S TIME NOW HERE WE GO!
IT'S RIGHT HERE BEHIND SOLOMON'S SEAL
IT'S EASY ENOUGH TO LIFT THE SEAL OUT

NOTHING!
WHAT? NOTHING??
NOT A THING NO EMERALD
NO "SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE" JUST THIS LETTER
BUT WHAT'S REALLY WEIRD IS. IT'S ADDRESSED TO ME
"TO CORTO MALTESE"
SO READ IT ALREADY.
"SEPTEMBER 20, 1912. DEAR FRIEND, I WAS AS DISAPPOINTED AS YOU ARE I DECIPHERED THE ARAB-RUNIC SIGNS, AS YOU HAVE, AND THEY LED ME TO SOLOMON'S SEAL. THE EMERALD WAS GONE. SOMEONE GOT THERE BEFORE US BUT WHO? DID SAUD KHALULA MAKE MONKEYS OUT OF US? WHO CAN SAY? FOR MY PART"
" the only thing I can do is continue this marvelous charade draw others to the same search
You, Corto, are a prime subject to get sucked into the game the eternal idler, a poor man's Don Quixote, a frustrating and frustrated seducer, romantic parasite, you'd jump at the chance
" TO GO OFF LOOKING FOR THIS FABULOUS EMERALD. WHEN YOU READ THIS, I'LL BE DEAD, BUT I FEEL SURE SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE IS STILL IN VENICE THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS, PERHAPS. PERHAPS.
"I HATE YOU I LOVE YOU, I ENVY YOU. I SALUTE YOU YOURS, BARON CORVO "
THAT DAMNED BARON GOT US, ALL RIGHT
YES. THE LETTER'S DATED APRIL 1, 1912. APRIL FOOL'S DAY. WHAT A WILD GOOSE CHASE HE LED US ON!
HE WAS CRAZY. AND YOU'RE LAUGHING ABOUT THIS!
HEY! WHAT'S ALL THAT SMOKE?
IT'S A FIRE!

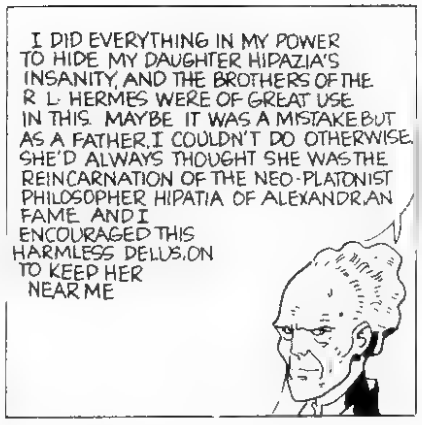
HIPAZIA'S UP THERE! WE'VE GOT TO SAVE HER!
HER FATHER'S THERE,TOO QUICK!
GOD IN HEAVEN! MY FIANCEE'S IN THERE!
WATCH OUT, BOEKE! NOT THAT WAY! WAIT FOR ME!
BOEKE WHERE ARE YOU? BOEKE
BANG!
STEVANI ?!?
I THOUGHT YOU WERE IN THE HOSP.TAL
I AM STILL IN THE HOSPITAL BUT TONIGHT I HAVE AN IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT.
AND I MUST SAY I'M JUST AS SURPRISED TO FIND YOU IN ALL THIS SMOKE

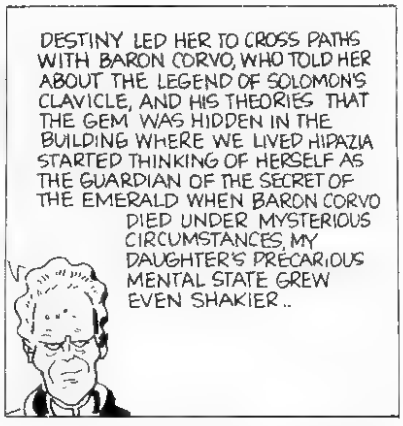
I GAVE YOU MY ADVICE. BUT YOU WOULDN'T TAKE IT! TOO BAD FOR YOU!
I'LL BET YOU STARTED THIS FIRE!
I DID IN RESPONSE TO THE BETRAYAL OF FALIERO AND HIS ACCOMPLICE, HIPAZIA
THEY TRIED TO KILL ME TO GET BARON CORVO'S DIARIES HIPAZIA'S THE ONE WHO SHOT ME THE OTHER DAY SHE MUST'VE GONE COMPLETELY INSANE. THEN SHE KILLED THE GUARD BUT I SETTLED THE SCORE.
THE "SERENISSIMA" HAS NO MERCY. THIS MADHOUSE IS FINISHED, AND NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.. SORRY, BUT
YOU KILLED HIPAZIA?
YES. TOO BAD SHE WAS THE ONLY ONE HERE WORTH A DAMN, BUT HER MADNESS WAS TOO DANGEROUS
TUSCK!
YOU KILLED HIPAZIA YOU BASTARD
KAF! KOF!
WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!
I HAVE TO SAVE HIPAZIA!
I HAVE TO SAVE HIPAZIA DON'T YOU SEE?
BUT..
HIPAZIA! HIPAZIA...
BOEKE! COME BACK!

POOR NUT
CAN'T SEE A THING I'M CHOKING
LOOK! SOMEONE'S COMING OUT!
WHAT HAPPENED? IS THERE ANYONE LEFT IN THERE?
I DON'T KNOW THE MEMBERS OF THE CULTURAL CLUB FINISHED THEIR MEETING MUCH EARLIER.. BUT LOOK
CORTO, I COULDN'T FIND HER I LOOKED FOR HIPAZIA, BUT SHE WASN'T THERE.. I FOUND THIS MAN..
IT'S THEON, HIPAZIA'S FATHER
I COULDN'T FIND HER... WHERE DID SHE GO?
I DON'T KNOW, BOEKE
SHE CAN'T JUST DISAPPEAR LIKE THAT I LOVE HER I'M GOING TO MARRY HIPAZIA..
BOEKE, STOP WE SHOULD GO NOW
JUST A MOMENT AREN'T YOU CORTO MALTESE?
YES, I AM WHAT DO YOU WANT?
COME WITH US TO THE STATION TO ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS
OKAY, BUT DON'T WASTE YOUR STEELY GAZE ON ME I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING YET

THE NEXT DAY
HI, LITTLE SILVER FOOT. WHERE'S BOEKE?
HE'S GONE. I THINK HE'S GOING TO SAIL AWAY SO BE IT
YES, IT MIGHT BE BETTER THAT WAY.
YES, YES HERE, EVERYTHING WILL REMIND HIM OF HIPAZIA
HE WON'T FORGET HIPAZIA BY LEAVING BUT IT'LL DO HIM GOOD
HOW ABOUT YOU, CORTO? WHAT'LL YOU DO NOW?
NO POINT IN HANGING AROUND SO I'LL BE GOING
I'LL BE BACK SOMEDAY, LITTLE SILVER FOOT
COME BACK WHENEVER YOU LIKE CORTO DEAR!
AT THE HOSPITAL
HELLO, DOCTOR I'D LIKE TO SEE DR THEON
HE'S WAITING IT'LL DO HIM GOOD TO TALK
GOOD DAY, CAPTAIN THANK YOU FOR COMING TO SEE ME

I CAME TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP, DR THEON
MERELY OUR DUTY. YOU WERE VERY DISCREET ABOUT US. HOW COULD WE REFUSE TO HELP YOU? IT WAS NOTHING..


I DID EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO HIDE MY DAUGHTER HIPAZIA'S INSANITY, AND THE BROTHERS OF THE R. L. HERMES WERE OF GREAT USE IN THIS. MAYBE IT WAS A MISTAKE BUT AS A FATHER, I COULDN'T DO OTHERWISE. SHE'D ALWAYS THOUGHT SHE WAS THE REINCARNATION OF THE NEO-PLATONIST PHILOSOPHER HIPATIA OF ALEXANDRIA FAME. AND I ENCOURAGED THIS HARMLESS DELUSION TO KEEP HER NEAR ME

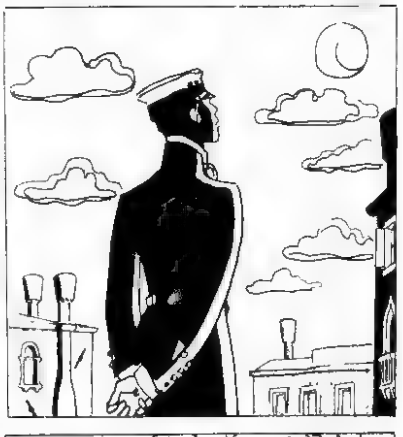

DESTINY LED HER TO CROSS PATHS WITH BARON CORVO, WHO TOLD HER ABOUT THE LEGEND OF SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE, AND HIS THEORIES THAT THE GEM WAS HIDDEN IN THE BUILDING WHERE WE LIVED. HIPAZIA STARTED THINKING OF HERSELF AS THE GUARDIAN OF THE SECRET OF THE EMERALD. WHEN BARON CORVO DIED UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES, MY DAUGHTER'S PRECARIOUS MENTAL STATE GREW EVEN SHAKIER..

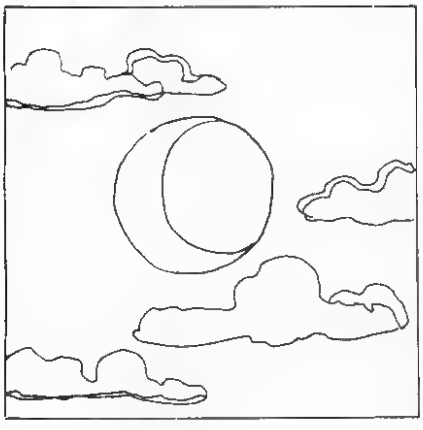
THEN YOU ARRIVED ON THE SCENE, CORTO MALTESE, WITH CLUES TO HELP FIND THE MAGIC STONE. HIPAZIA DECIDED TO ELIMINATE EVERYONE WHO WAS SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON'S EMERALD. SHE TRIED TO KILL STEVANI, USING FALIERO, WHO LOVED HER. SHE KILLED A GUARD AND WOULD'VE KILLED YOU, TOO, CORTO. THAT'S WHY I TRIED TO GET YOU TO LEAVE VENICE

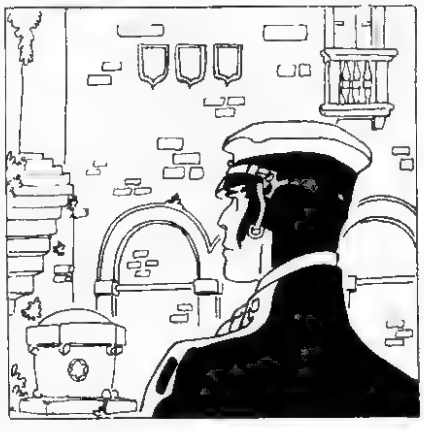
BUT, AS WE SEE, IT WAS ALL FOR NAUGHT. MY DAUGHTER IS DEAD, AND THREE OTHER PEOPLE WITH HER. BARON CORVO'S DIARY BURNED IN THE FIRE, AND POOR BOEKE IS COMPLETELY BROKEN NOW THAT MY DAUGHTER IS DEAD. WHAT A CATASTROPHE!

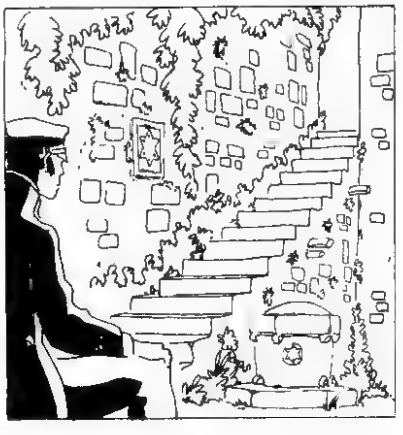
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. YOU'RE RIGHT, DR THEON. A CATASTROPHE. BUT I'D LIKE PERMISSION TO GO BACK TO YOUR HOUSE
GO AHEAD, MY FRIEND. GO AHEAD. IF IT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER. YOU HAVE MY PERMISSION.

LET'S SEE. IT'S APRIL 24TH





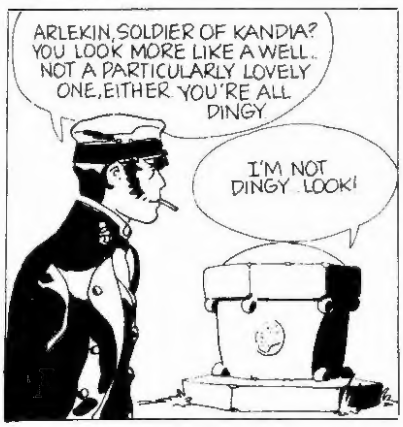




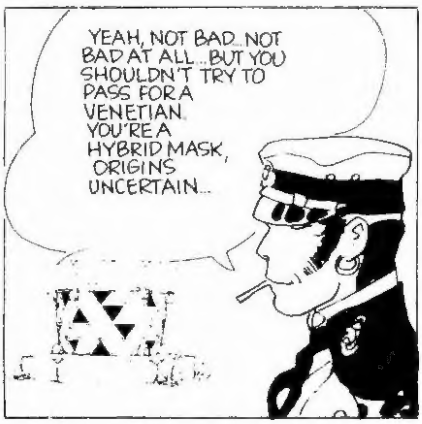
WELL, WHAT DO YOU WANT?

ME? WHAT DO I WANT? SILLY QUESTION! YOU SHOULDN'T BE MOPING AROUND, ALL SAD LIKE THAT...

I'M NOT SAD A LITTLE PENSIVE, MAYBE. BUT WHO ARE YOU?
I AM "ARLEKIN BATOCIO" A SOLDIER OF KANDIA AND ONE OF THE MASKS OF VENICE


ARLEKIN, SOLDIER OF KANDIA? YOU LOOK MORE LIKE A WELL.. NOT A PARTICULARLY LOVELY ONE, EITHER. YOU'RE ALL DINGY.
I'M NOT DINGY. LOOK!

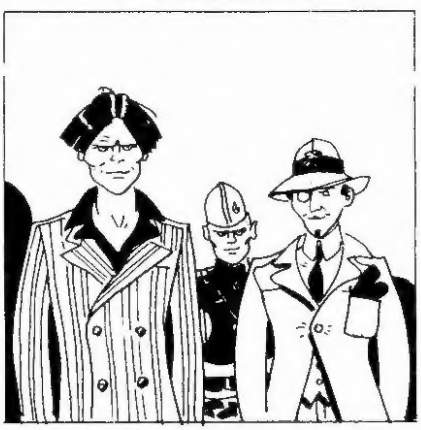
LOOK AT ALL THESE COLORS! HOW DO YOU LIKE ME? BE HONEST...


YEAH, NOT BAD. NOT BAD AT ALL... BUT YOU SHOULDN'T TRY TO PASS FOR A VENETIAN. YOU'RE A HYBRID MASK, ORIGINS UNCERTAIN...

HEY! DON'T GET MAD! I WAS JUST JOKING. AND NOW LET'S CALL OUR PROTAGONISTS.. SINCE IT'S APRIL 24TH AND WE'RE ON THE "STAIRWAY OF ENCOUNTERS"

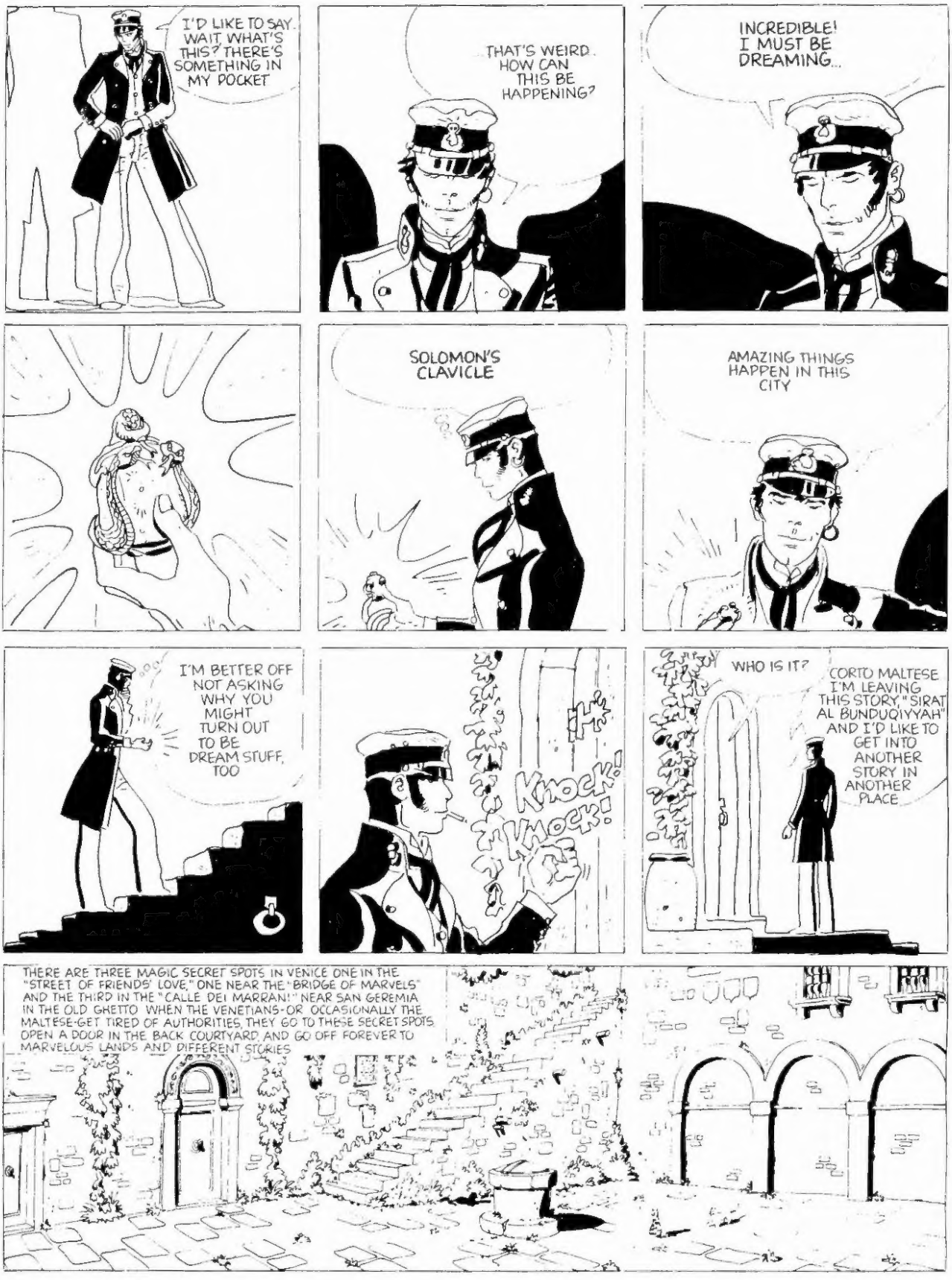
BEPI FALIERO!...

GOOD. STAND OVER HERE, BEPI. AND NOW LET'S HAVE STEVANI, BOSELLI AND THE POET...



...GREAT... RIGHT OVER HERE... LITTLE SILVER FOOT, THEON, LOUISE... THIS CAN ONLY HAPPEN IN VENICE...

...BOEKE, SAUD KHALULA OF THE SARACEN BLACK GUARDS, AND SCHULZ...
THE CARABINIERI AND THE FREEMASONS OF THE R'L' HERMES...
AND NOW HIPAZIA!
IT'S NOW MIDNIGHT, APRIL 25TH, DAY OF SAINT MARK, PATRON SAINT OF VENICE. IN KEEPING WITH TRADITION, HERE ARE SOME "BOCCOLO" WITH MY THANKS FOR FOLLOWING ALONG IN THIS FABLE...
...AND NOW, PARTNERS, WE SALUTE ALL THOSE WHO HAVE LISTENED AND SUPPORTED US WITH SUCH KINDNESS AND COURTESY, WE HOPE THEY'VE ENJOYED THIS EXTRAVAGANZA
PARDON ME. ONE MORE MINUTE, IF YOU DON'T MIND.


I'D LIKE TO SAY. WAIT, WHAT'S THIS? THERE'S SOMETHING IN MY POCKET
THAT'S WEIRD. HOW CAN THIS BE HAPPENING?
INCREDIBLE! I MUST BE DREAMING...
SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE
AMAZING THINGS HAPPEN IN THIS CITY
I'M BETTER OFF NOT ASKING WHY YOU MIGHT TURN OUT TO BE DREAM STUFF, TOO
KNOCK! KNOCK!
WHO IS IT?
CORTO MALTESE I'M LEAVING THIS STORY, "SIRAT AL BUNDUQIYYAH" AND I'D LIKE TO GET INTO ANOTHER STORY IN ANOTHER PLACE
THERE ARE THREE MAGIC SECRET SPOTS IN VENICE ONE IN THE "STREET OF FRIENDS' LOVE," ONE NEAR THE "BRIDGE OF MARVELS" AND THE THIRD IN THE "CALLE DEI MARRANI" NEAR SAN GEREMIA IN THE OLD GHETTO. WHEN THE VENETIANS-OR OCCASIONALLY THE MALTESE-GET TIRED OF AUTHORITIES, THEY GO TO THESE SECRET SPOTS, OPEN A DOOR IN THE BACK COURTYARD, AND GO OFF FOREVER TO MARVELOUS LANDS AND DIFFERENT STORIES

3 1191 00362 6363

SOME APPRENTICES ARE SUFFICIENTLY TRAINED ALREADY TO HELP US. IT'S NOT WISE TO INSIST ON THEIR KEEPING QUIET.
BANG!
BANG!
BANG!
WHAT IS ALL THIS?

Mysticism, the occult, Free-Masonry and even the first stirrings of fascism create many a riddle for Corto to unravel as he searches Venice for a legendary emerald.

$10.95
ISBN 0-918348-96-X
Graphic novel/adventure